



UNMASKING SOPHISTRY

A Journal of Christian Evidences and Comparative Religions

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“See to it that there is no one who takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception in accordance with human tradition, in accordance with the elementary principles of the world, rather than in accordance with Christ.”

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From The Editor's Desk

This is the fourth issue of Unmasking Sophistry magazine published in the year 2022 and it is the seventh edition published since inception. God has been faithful and we are grateful to Him. The aim of this journal is to communicate the truth of God's word as well as expose the various arguments that have been prepared in defense of false religion and arguments designed to oppose the Christian faith. In order to cover a wide range of areas, various sections have been created in this journal and topics relating to each of the sections will be discussed at every edition in a consistent manner.

Various subjects were examined under each of the sections in the last edition including: *Dissolving A Few Oneness Pentecostal Aspirins; Wrong Word Invalidates Catholic Baptisms; Pouring Water On A Duck's Back; A Discourse on the Godhead and Baptismal Formula; Jesus Built His Church; Jacob Creath Jr.: Willing To Be Ruined*, etc.

However, this edition shall focus on topics such as; *The Sign of Jonah & Christ's Resurrection; Religious Attires: What Should The Christians Wear? A Discourse on Eternal Life: Present Possession or Future Possession? The Church At The End Of The First Century; A Graduate of Any Recognized Bible College; What America Needs; Teaching The Next Generation; Judge Not, That Ye Be Not Judged; How God Turned A Curse Into A Blessing; How Can A Person Work Righteousness? Most Believers Just Do What Is Expected Of Them By Their Congregations; The Law Of Tithe - Is it for Christians?; How Do I Chose A Church?;* and other intriguing topics.

You are warmly reminded that **Unmasking Sophistry Magazine** is available online and all editions (past and present) can be accessed and downloaded online at www.unmaskingsophistry.com/downloads

The open-door policy of the magazine is still very much intact – if anyone disagrees with an article in any edition of the magazine, such could write a rebuttal to it and we would be willing to publish it in the same issue to which the article he is replying appeared. Alternatively, a proposition will be set for the writer of the article and whoever dissents to affirm and deny respectively as the case may be – with the aim of knowing the truth on the subject matter.

We appreciate all the encouragements from readers and those who have recently subscribed to be receiving this journal. God bless you all. By His grace, we would continue to hold fast the pattern of sound words which we have heard from the apostles, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus (II Timothy 1:13; Acts 2:42).

God's Love and Blessings.

Osamagbe Lesley Egharevba
Editor

CHRISTIAN EVIDENCES

The Sign of Jonah and Christ's Resurrection

By Osamagbe Lesley EGHAREVBA | Lagos, Nigeria

"But He answered and said to them, 'An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.'" (Matthew 12:39-40)

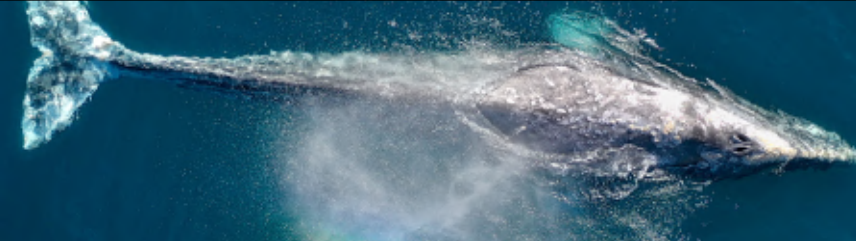
When Muslim folks read the above passage (Matthew 12:39-40), what comes to their minds is that Jesus is saying that He was not going to die or be raised from the dead. In his debate with Paul K. Williams on whether or not Jesus rose from the dead, Ahmed Deedat's main argument was from Matthew 12:40. He asked the audience if Jonah was in the belly of the fish **dead or alive** for three days; and the response was that Jonah was in there alive for three days and three nights. Hence, Deedat's argument was that since Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish **alive**, Jesus was in the tomb three days and three nights **alive** – thus he maintained that Jesus did not die and there was nothing like resurrection. Some other modern Muslim debaters have adopted this argument and offered it as evidence to prove that the Bible teaches Jesus did not die nor did He resurrect from the dead. But how sound is this argument?

In the first place, I would like to say that it is one thing to deny the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ – but an attempt to use the Bible to prove such falsehood shows that one is either completely ignorant or deliberately mischievous. No sincere person should read the scriptures and even attempt to use it to prove that Jesus was not raised from the dead because there are abundant passages of the scriptures that prove that Jesus died and was raised from the dead. Paul said that Jesus was “*declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead*” (Romans 1:4).

What was Jesus saying in Matthew 12:39-40? Does the sign of Jonah prove that Jesus was going to be alive in the tomb? Obviously not! Indeed, what some Muslims have done to this text is to overstretch the comparison that was made and then use it in a way that is not intended. A careful reading of that passage would reveal that nothing was said in the text about Jonah being **dead or alive** in the belly of the fish; and to introduce that into the text to prove a point is ridiculous. When there is a comparison in a text, it is very wrong to use it in any other way except as that comparison is intended. Consider this statement that was made by Jesus in John 3:14; “*And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up*” Here is a similar comparison to that of Matthew 12:40, and if I were to behave like the Muslims and ask the question; “Did Moses lift up the serpent in the wilderness dead or alive?” what would be the answer? Indeed, Moses did not lift up a live serpent – the serpent was lifeless! Would that not prove that Jesus was going to be lifted up (crucified) dead? But the truth is: none of these passages has any reference to “dead” or “alive.” The point of comparison in Matthew 12:40 is three days and three nights while the point of comparison in John 3:14 is that Jesus was going to be lifted up.

Having said that, let us now see if the Scriptures prove that Jesus Christ would die and be raised from the dead. A good passage to look at is Matthew 28:1-7:

Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn, Mary



Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it. His countenance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. And the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead men. But the angel answered and said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. **He is not here; for He is risen, as He said.** Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly and tell His disciples that **He is risen from the dead,** and indeed He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him. Behold, I have told you.”

A careful reading of this passage would reveal that the angel not only told the women that Jesus is risen from the dead but He emphasized that this was exactly **as Jesus said**. This means that Jesus had made a statement before his death that He was going to be raised from the dead. Since the angel referred to Jesus' statement to show that Jesus would be raised from the dead, that shows clearly that the argument from the sign of Jonah as advanced by the Muslims, is false and makes no logical sense. But can we find anywhere in the scriptures where Jesus made the statement that He would be raised from the dead? I think that the answer to this question will put an end to the argument.

In Matthew 16:4, Jesus said “*A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.*” Here is another instance where Jesus makes reference to the sign of Jonah in the book of Matthew. But what does this

mean? I would not bother much to explain its meaning but one thing is sure: **whatever the sign of Jonah means, it certainly would not refer to anything that would contradict the rest of what Jesus said in the chapter!** Does the sign of Jonah mean that Jesus would not be raised from the dead? Pay attention to verses 21-23 of Matthew 16:

From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, **and be killed, and be raised the third day.** Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, “Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!” But He turned and said to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.”

In this verse, Jesus Christ was talking about His suffering, His death and resurrection. The Bible says that he showed His disciples that He **MUST be killed and be raised the third day!** Was the angel mistaken in Matthew 28:6 to have referenced Jesus? Not at all for Jesus actually said so! But notice that Peter thinks differently while Jesus was saying these things! He thought that would not be possible for the Messiah and Saviour of the world to be killed and he even rebuked Jesus and told Him that such would not happen to Him. Jesus noted that such thinking is satanic! To think and say that Jesus would not die and be raised the third day is Satanic! That shows that anyone who is opposing or denying the death burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ today is simply satanic and qualified to be called “Satan.”

Without a doubt, the sign of Jonah would not be



referring to the argument that Jesus would not die. If it means that Jesus would not die, why would Jesus refer to it in Matthew 16:4 and then come to verses 21-23 to speak about His death and resurrection and then even call someone who oppose it “Satan”? Clearly, the Muslims are mistaken on this argument. If the Muslims believe the Bible as the word of God even as their Quran teaches them to (and as some of them have claimed to believe), they should be willing to accept what it says and not twist certain passages to prove a false teaching that they have conjured up in their minds. No one can believe the Bible and then oppose the resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ who will Judge the world at His appearing (II Timothy 4:1; Acts 17:30-31).

WRONG IS NOT RIGHT

We live in a day where people want everything to be relative i. e. a thing is right and wrong if the individual thinks it is right or wrong. Consequently, many challenge the thought that there is a fixed standard of right and wrong. They accept no standards, no principles, no right or wrong, no nothing! Such thinking is becoming rampant in religion. People are taught they have a right to believe whatever they want to believe. This mindset is not new. In Judges 21: 25 we read: “*Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.*” That equals multiple standards.

Granted, as creatures of choice, we can believe what we want to, even if what we believe is wrong. For example, if one wants to believe there is 10 inches in a foot, he can do so, but he will be wrong every time. Just so, in religion there is such a thing as being religiously wrong, which presupposes a fixed standard, and assures that doing “*what is right in our own eyes*” is not

permissible. In Deut. 12: 1 we read: “*These are the statutes and judgments which you shall be careful to observe.*” Verse 8 says: “*You shall not at all do as we are doing here today-every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes.*” Isaiah said the people “*called evil good and good evil*” and put no distinction between “*darkness and light*” because they were “*wise in their own eyes, and clever in their own sight*” (Isa. 5: 20-21). Such convoluted thinking is gaining ground in society today. Reaction to sin and false doctrine is being so toned down that there is no distinction between good and evil in the average mind. Those who are wise in their own eyes, seek to explain God's Word away to a culture that has little knowledge of God and His Word. These do not retain God in their knowledge, but consider themselves to be wise, when in actuality they are fools (Rom. 1: 22, 28).

No matter what one may think about it, 10 inches is not a foot. No matter how hard one may try to make wrong right, or immorality moral, or false teaching true, it is still wrong, immoral, and false. “*It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps*” (Jer. 10: 23). God's standard is the “*good and acceptable, and perfect will of God*” (Rom. 12: 2). Thus, “*Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct your paths*” (Prov. 3: 5-6).

Think on these things.

–Dennis Abernathy

World Religions

Religious Attires: What Should The Christians Wear?

By Osamagbe Lesley EGHAREVBA | Lagos, Nigeria

Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil
(Ephesians 6:11)

Certain religions of the world have attires or garments that they wear and by which they are known or identified. For example, a Muslim woman is easily identified when you see her put on a hijab. The Buddhist monks (also called *Bhikkhu*) have a peculiar kind of attire and way of dressing especially at their monasteries. In the African Traditional Religion (ATR), a *native doctor* in his shrine dresses in a certain way that easily tells the onlooker that he is an adherent of the African Traditional Religion. Some denominational churches have certain attires that some or all the church members must wear to church services and other occasions. A good example is the White Garment Church in Nigeria which includes the Cherubim and Seraphim church as well as the Celestial Church of Christ among others.

Having said that, a very interesting and unusual thing happened in Nigeria on Thursday, 23rd of June, 2022. A Lagos-based human rights lawyer, Malcom Omirhobo, was seen to have attended proceedings at the Supreme Court of Nigeria and was dressed in what is described as a traditional worshipper's attire. In other words, his dressing resembles how a Nigerian *native doctor* would dress in his shrine - he was barefooted with black feathers attached to his wig, a white circle was drawn around his right eye, had a red cloth wrapped over his waist and something that seems to be a charm was placed around his neck hanging on a red cloth, etc. Without a doubt, his appearance drew a lot of attention.

Meanwhile, when the lawyer was interviewed, he said that the reason why he appeared in court in an unusual

attire was because of the judgement of the Supreme Court in the previous week affirming the rights of Muslim female pupils to attend school wearing hijab in Lagos public schools. Indeed, the Supreme Court of Nigeria had in a judgement delivered on June 17, 2022, granted the use of hijab by female Muslim students in government-owned schools in Lagos. Based on this, the lawyer said that the decision of the Supreme Court can be applied to every other religion and maintained that the traditional attire would be his mode of dressing to court in all his future appearances and ensure his children also dress to school in the same way. He actually appeared again at the Federal High court on Monday 27th of June dressed in the same attire.

Taking a look at the reason given by this lawyer on why he appeared in court that way, it seems that it is logical and reasonable. Indeed, if the court could allow the Muslim girls dress to schools in their religious attire, then in order to be fair, balance and impartial, it would only make sense to allow people of other religions appear in schools in their various religious attires. However, the focus of this writing is neither to address the decision of the court nor the appearance of this lawyer in court. Rather, the article aims to address the question of a friend who after seeing this incident asked me; '*Which garment should the Christians wear?*'

In addressing this question, the only place to get a legitimate answer is to look at the New Testament; the Book of God that tells us the origin of the Christian religion. The New Testament tells us when Christianity began, who were the first Christians as



well as their activities. Since we have such a book as this, it would help to answer this important question. One passage that comes to my mind is Ephesians 4:11-17. In that passage of scripture, it tells us what the Christians should put on:

Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God;

Our attire as true Christians should be what the New Testament has given here. A Christian is to put on “the whole armor of God” and this include girding ourselves with the truth, having the breastplate of righteousness, shodding our feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace, taking the shield of faith, having the helmet of salvation as well as the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God. This is the outfit of a true Christian and people should identify us when they see us put on this whole armor. This is our light that should shine before men and when they see our

good works, they will glorify our Father who is in heaven (Matthew 5:16). This goes on to show that Christianity is different to other religions; while some folks think that their physical appearance (such as putting on white garments, etc.) in their places of worship, is what make them holy or pure, God does not require such from His children today. In fact, Jesus condemns judging by appearance – “*Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment*” (John 7:24). This is not to imply that physical appearance does not matter or that one may dress indecently. There are passages that guides the Christians on how to dress but no particular type or colour of clothing is mandated for Christians to wear today.

Does The New Testament Authorize A Particular Kind Of Clothing?

Reading through the New Testament, one would see that it stresses modest dressing without a direct reference to a particular type of clothing. In I Timothy 2:9-10 Paul tells the women to chose clothing that exemplifies three qualities: modest, propriety, and moderation. In explaining these terms Jeffery Hamilton says;

The word “modest” comes from the Greek word *komios*, and it refers to things that are orderly, showing good behavior, or respectable. “Propriety” is from the word *aidos*, and means to have a sense of shame, bashfulness, or reverence. “Moderation” is from the word *sophrosune*; it means having good sense, a soundness of mind, and a display of self-restraint. Sensual or lewd attire is ruled out by these guidelines. It doesn't demonstrate the Christian's way



of life (Ephesians 4:17-24). Nor should Christians select outfits that puts their wealth on display (I Peter 3:3-4). Nor should we chose clothes that demonstrate rebellion against the standards of society (I Thessalonians 5:14). Society does have informal rules of conduct governing correct behavior, including respectfulness demonstrated in the selection of clothing.

This tells us that Christians are to dress decently. Our God is a God of order and wants all things to be done decently and in order (I Corinthians 14:40). Christians have a right to chose what to wear even to worship services but they must be guided by godly principles. James 2:1-13 talks about attire at the worship service and in this passage, it is clearly stated that there should be no discrimination on the basis of what another is wearing;

My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality. For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, "You sit here in a good place," and say to the poor man, "You stand there," or, "Sit here at my footstool," have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?

This passage further confirms that the kind, colour or style of cloth to wear is immaterial. Those who claim to be Christians and insists on a particular religious dress for some or all of their members are simply teaching as doctrines the commandments of men and

the result is vain worship (Matthew 15:1-9). My advice would be that you should "*Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you.*" (II Corinthians 6:17).

Reference

Hamilton, J. (n.d.) Dress Codes. Retrieved from <http://lavistachurchofchrist.org/LVarticles/DressCodes.htm>



Buddhists in their attire



A Muslim woman putting on hijab (attire for women)



Nigerian lawyer who appeared in court dressed in Nigerian traditional worshipper's attire.

DISCOURSE

Eternal Life: Present Possession or Future Possession?

The topic for discussion in this section centers on whether or not Christians presently possess eternal life. Two articles have been presented here for the consideration of readers. Everyone is encouraged to study both articles with their Bibles.

Do Christians Presently Possess Eternal Life?

By Patrick Donahue | Alabama, USA

Many times in debates on the Once Saved Always Saved topic, Baptists make the argument that the Christian possesses eternal life, and since that life is eternal, he cannot lose that life (his salvation). A common response to that argument is the Christian does not actually presently possess eternal life, but I think that response is a mistake.

The following passages say plainly a faithful Christian has present possession of “everlasting life”:

- John 5:24 [Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.](#) (so a Christian has passed from death unto everlasting life [past tense] - that is conclusive).

- John 3:36 [He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.](#)

- John 6:47 [Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.](#)

- John 6:54 [Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.](#)

- I John 5:11-13 [And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye](#)

[may believe on the name of the Son of God.](#)

As with any Bible subject, we should take the clear meaning of the above five passages unless something elsewhere in the Bible dictates otherwise. Many teach there is such justification (to reject the obvious meaning in this case) because of passages like the following that teach that we “hope” for eternal life:

- Titus 1:2 [In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began;](#)

- Luke 18:30 [Who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting.](#)

But we must not put one passage in the Bible against another, meaning we cannot just accept these last two verses and ignore the previous five – they all must be true. Actually passages like these last two do not mitigate against the simple and obvious meaning of the first five proof texts above. Let me illustrate. Suppose our baseball team has a lead going into the fourth inning. I could truthfully say “we have the lead,” and at the same time say “we hope to have the lead at the end of the game.” You see, a team can have present possession of a lead at any point during the game, but until the end of the game, that lead is susceptible to loss. Because it is possible for the lead to be lost, we can presently possess the lead, and yet still [hope](#) to have the lead at the end of the game. This especially makes sense when we understand that having the lead during the game is good, but having



the lead at the conclusion of the game is all that really matters in the end. The end of the game lead cannot be lost. That is the only score that will count in the final standings.

The same is true of eternal life. We presently possess it if we are faithful Christians. And our possession of eternal life means we possess something that lasts forever. But until our life is over (Revelation 14:13) our possession of eternal life is susceptible to loss, since it is possible to forfeit it (fall from grace, Galatians 5:4, etc.). If we lose eternal life, then we have lost something that lasts forever. It is important to possess eternal life presently, but what will matter in the end is if we possess eternal life at our death, and therefore in the hereafter, where we can't lose it.

As I said, some say we only possess eternal life "in prospect" or "in hope." But that is really saying we don't actually possess eternal life here and now, and so that would contradict the first five proof texts this article begins with. And as far as I know, there is no passage forcing us to conclude we only possess eternal life in prospect while on this earth.

Some think there is a contradiction in the ideas of presently possessing eternal life and being able to lose it. But perhaps the following illustrations will help resolve that apparent difficulty:

- Adam and Eve possessed eternal physical life (as long as they ate of the tree of life) until they sinned, but they lost it when they sinned and were barred access to the tree of life (Gen 3:22,24). Likewise, God can give someone eternal life and He can take it away. As a matter of fact, He can do anything He wants to; we shouldn't try to box Him in. So it is a matter of what God's revelation teaches, not what can or can't be done according to our own human logic. And John 3:36 clearly teaches we can lose everlasting life (when taken

in combination with texts like Heb. 3:1,12).

- It is possible to possess something that lasts forever, but not to possess it forever. For example, a banker might own a mortgage that is to last 30 years, but would be glad to sell it for a fair price - then he wouldn't possess it anymore. The mortgage is to last 30 years, but the banker does not necessarily possess it for that long.

- A famous expression is "diamonds last forever." But you can lose a diamond, right? Similarly, eternal life is the kind of life (spiritual) that lasts forever, but you can lose it.

- If we have a watch with a lifetime warranty, that says the watch is guaranteed to last for our lifetime, but what if we lose the watch?

- Just because something is said to last forever, that doesn't necessarily mean it can't be reversed. For example, does I Chron. 28:9 ("**... if thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever**") mean it is impossible for one who falls away to ever return?

Having "eternal life" would not mean it is impossible to lose that life any more than "**he that cometh to me shall never hunger**" and "**he that believeth on me shall never thirst**" (John 6:35) means it is impossible to lose our salvation and hunger and thirst spiritually again. Presently possessing "eternal life" would not mean it is impossible to lose it any more than "**For the Lord loveth judgment, and forsaketh not his saints; they are preserved for ever**" (Psalms 37:28a) means it is impossible to lose our salvation even though the verse says God will preserve his saints "forever." Yes a saint's preservation lasts forever, but he can lose that forever lasting preservation, because it is conditional. Likewise a saint's spiritual life lasts forever, but he can lose that forever lasting life, because it is conditional.



A reading of John 6:29-58 would seem to indicate the terms “eternal life” and “spiritual life” are used interchangeably and refer to the same thing. Notice also “eternal life” is used in antithesis to spiritual death in Romans 6:23 (“**For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord**”). And I think the reader will agree I John 5:12 is talking about our present possession of spiritual life, and it is made equivalent to “eternal life” in verses 11 and 13. Since “eternal life” and “spiritual life” are equivalent, the question becomes - can we lose spiritual life? The reader will hopefully agree the answer is “yes,” and since spiritual life is proven to be equivalent to eternal life, logically we can lose that also.

Consider also the following two verses: John 6:53 says “**Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.**” That doesn't make sense if the people who eat and drink of Jesus flesh and blood (appropriate His sacrifice to themselves) don't have that life in them. And verse 54 shows that Jesus is talking about eternal life in verse 53. I John 3:15 reads “**Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.**” That doesn't make good sense if non-murderers (who are also faithful in other respects) don't actually have eternal life abiding in them.

As was pointed out earlier, eternal life is synonymous with spiritual life (John 5:24, I John 5:11-12) and therefore synonymous with salvation. We receive salvation now (Mark 16:16, II Tim 1:9, Tit 3:5), but also receive it in a more final sense in heaven (Rom 5:9-10, 13:11, II Tim 2:10, etc.). Logically then we can receive eternal life now, and receive it in a more final sense in heaven. So we receive salvation (eternal life) now, but in heaven we can't lose it.

In conclusion, the Bible conclusively teaches faithful Christians are in present possession of eternal (spiritual) life. But we can lose that life/salvation, therefore we strive and hope to have the same at the day of judgment.

THE RIGHTEOUS HAVE ENOUGH

Throughout the book of Proverbs, the wise man described the difference between the righteous and the wicked. Their behavior would lead to either *blessings* (for the righteous) or *negative consequences* (for the wicked).

One contrast between these two types of people is this: “*The righteous has enough to satisfy his appetite, but the stomach of the wicked is in need*” (Proverbs 13:25). On the surface, this appears to be talking about the provisions that each receive, as if the righteous will gain more than the wicked. This may happen sometimes, but it is not always the case in this life.

This statement is also about *contentment*. The righteous man is content with whatever God has blessed him with (he believes he “*has enough*”). The wicked man is not content and is always wanting more no matter what blessings he has received.

We need to learn to be content. If we always want “more,” we will never be satisfied with what God provides. We will have perceived “needs” that are not truly needs.

So remember that the righteous have enough. Let us recognize the richness of God's blessings. Rather than always wanting “more,” let us learn contentment.

–Andy Sochor

DISCOURSE

Eternal Life: Present Possession or Future Possession?

Eternal Life

By Keith Sharp | Arkansas, USA

The great promise that we have in Christ is eternal life (John 10:27-28). Calvinists teach the present possession of eternal life by Christians as a basis for the doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints (Once Saved - Always Saved). Some brethren teach eternal life is presently possessed. When do Christians come into actual possession of eternal life?

Definition

“Eternal” means

without beginning or end, that which always has been and always will be.... 2. without beginning.... 3. without end, never to cease. everlasting.... gives prominence to the immeasurableness of eternity... (Thayer. 20-21); “without end” (Arndt & Gingrich. 28); “indeterminate as to duration, eternal, everlasting” (Mounce. 1074).

“Life” is more than mere existence. In the resurrection the wicked shall exist but shall not have life (John 5:28-29).

Spiritual life is the opposite of spiritual death (1 John 3:14). Spiritual death is the result of separation from God's fellowship. Adam died in the day he first sinned (Genesis 2:16-17); but he lived many more years physically (Genesis 5:3-5). He lost the intimate fellowship with the Lord God he had previously enjoyed on the very day he sinned (Genesis 3:22-24). The body separated from the spirit is physically dead (James 2:26). Sin separates us from God (Isaiah 59:1-2), bringing spiritual death.

Conversely, spiritual life is fellowship with God (1 John 1:3; 5:12).

Thus, eternal life is fellowship with God which is endless in duration.

Arguments Which Demonstrate Eternal Life Is a Future Possession

Any passage which demonstrates the possibility of apostasy proves eternal life is a future possession. For example, Galatians 5:4: “You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.”


Many passages plainly teach eternal life is a future possession.

“And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life” (Matthew 25:46)

“So Jesus answered and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time—houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions—and in the age to come, eternal life'”; Mark 10:29-30 cf. Luke 18:29-30)

“He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life” (John 12:25).

“But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who 'will render to each one according to his deeds': eternal life to those who by



patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality” (Romans 2:5-7).

“But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life” (Romans 6:22).

The way Christian presently possess eternal life is in hope (Titus 1:2; 3:7). We do not hope for something we actually possess (Romans 8:24-25).

Passages Which Affirm Christians Have Eternal Life

But there are several passages which affirm that saved people have eternal life (John 3:15-16, 36; 5:24; 6:47,54; 10:28; 1 John 5:11-13). We have eternal life in the same way Abraham was a father of many nations before he even had the promised son (Genesis 17:5), in the same way God had given Joshua Jericho while the walls of the city still stood (Joshua 6:2), in the same way the Divine Son had been born when Isaiah wrote (Isaiah 9:6), and in the same way Christ had shed His blood when He instituted the Lord's Supper (Matthew 26:28), i.e., by hope through the divine, unbreakable promise (Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:13-20).

Quality or Quantity?

Some brethren argue that “eternal life” refers to quality, not quantity, and is presently possessed but can be forfeited. They make the comparison to a gold coin, which may be long lasting but not possessed very long. Life is a relationship, not an object to be carried in one's pocket. If that relationship, fellowship with God, is eternal, it cannot be lost.

These same brethren affirm “eternal” refers to the quality of the “life” in Christ. They are redefining biblical words to suit themselves. If I can be my own dictionary, I can prove anything I want, just like the queen in “Alice in Wonderland.” “Eternal” refers to duration; “life” refers to quality of existence.

Pertinent Questions

Here's some pertinent questions for these brethren. If eternal life can be forfeited now, why not in heaven? (Matthew 25:46; cf. Luke 16:26) If eternal life can be lost, what about eternal destruction? (Matthew 25:46) If eternal life can be forfeited, can God forfeit His eternal existence? (1 Timothy 1:17) To actually “have” eternal life is to “inherit” it (Matthew 19:17; Mark 10:17), i.e., to actually possess it as our own.

Conclusion

Christians presently actually possess life, fellowship with God, which can be broken by sin (Romans 6:11). We live in hope of eternal life, endless fellowship with God, which can never be terminated (Romans 6:22-23). Do you have this life and this hope?

KNOW WHAT YOU'RE WORKING FOR

In the book of Ecclesiastes, the wise man wrote about the futility of life “*under the sun*” (Ecclesiastes 1:14). Real meaning and purpose had to be found by looking beyond this life.

Yet daily activities had to continue. Responsibilities still needed to be met. However, these activities must be kept in their proper place.

It is possible for the labors of this life to distract us from our true purpose. The wise man wrote, “*Then I looked again at vanity under the sun. There was a certain man without a dependent, having neither a son nor a brother, yet there was no end to all his labor. Indeed, his eyes were not satisfied with riches and he never asked, 'And for whom am I laboring and depriving myself of pleasure?' This too is vanity and it is a grievous task*” (Ecclesiastes 4:7-8). Work itself was not the goal (neither was pleasure). While it is good to work hard, we need to have a reason for our efforts.

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QUIBBLES THAT BACKFIRED


This section tagged “Quibbles that Backfired” deals with interesting statements and arguments that have been made by people during discussions by way of defense in attempts to justify and sustain their position regarding the subject involved. Some of these quibbles backfired in that the termination of it showed the complete incongruity of the statement made. Others backfired because they reverted upon the person who made them and put him in the very same predicament in which he intended to put the other fellow.

During a discussion on whether a man with one child is scripturally qualified to be ordained as an elder in the church of the Lord, someone made the argument that if an announcement is made in the church that parents who have children should come to the right hand side and those without children should come to the left, a man with one child is expected to go to the right hand side and that would mean that a man with one child has children. I turned the argument around and asked the brother this question: *“Suppose my congregation has only one elder, and I go out to an event, and the announcement is made: ‘If your congregation has elders, please come to the right hand side and if your congregation does not have elders, come to the left hand side.’ Going by your argument, which side will I go to? Right side or left side?”* The brother responded that I will go over to the right hand side and I showed that if I will go to the side with elders even when my congregation only has one elder, then that should prove that a congregation with one elder has elders just as a man with one child has children. Hence, that would justify a congregation to appoint a single elder. What proves too much proves nothing.

During my debate with a Oneness Pentecostal on the baptismal formula question, he said; *“a name is simply a term by which a person, place or thing is called.”* I admitted and made the argument that “Father,” “Son” and “Holy Spirit” are names and that those are the three names mentioned in Matthew 28:19. I also cited Mark 14:36 and Isaiah 9:6 to show that “Father” is

used as a name. My opponent disagrees and said because the definite article “the” appears before each of the three words, then it indicates roles; and then insists that the grammatical construction of Matthew 28:19 means that there is only one single name for the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. He said baptism is to be done in the NAME and not NAMES of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. His argument is that because the word “name” is singular, then there is just one name and the name according to him is **“the Lord Jesus Christ.”** I cited Genesis 48:16 where Jacob said *“Let my name be named upon them, And the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac;”* Here, Jacob used the singular word “name” in connection with fathers and I asked my opponent, “What is the one name of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob?” He ran to Hebrews 11:8-9 and said the single name of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is “heir.” I reminded him that Hebrews 11:9 reads; *“...the heirs with him of the same promise”* and not *“...heirs with him of the same promise.”* If the definite articles before the words “Father”, “Son” and “Holy Spirit” in Matthew 28:19 disqualifies the terms from being names, then the definite article in Hebrews 11:9 should not allow “heir” to be qualified as a name and even **“the Lord Jesus Christ”** would not be a name since my opponents has the definite article in it.

W. Curtis Porter met with Ben Bogard in a debate at Hobart, Oklahoma in 1940. Discussing the matter of wearing the Groom's name, Porter insisted that the



church being the bride of Christ should wear the name of the Groom. In response, Bogard said, "Porter, you are all wrong about that. You fellows are always talking about the church wearing the name of the Groom. The bride wearing the name of the husband. You don't have any Bible for it at all its pure human tradition. Human philosophy. Porter, I give you five hundred dollars to read anywhere in the Bible where any wife ever wore the name of her husband." Bogard walked back and forth on the stage and grew more confident, and raised his offer to a thousand dollars. He said, "I'll give you a thousand dollars, if you will read anywhere in God's book that a wife ever wore the name of her HUSBAND." Porter said in reply, "Mr. Bogard, will you please write out that check for a thousand dollars, and get one of your brethren to hold it for me. I am fixing to collect." Porter stepped over to the blackboard, and rehearsed briefly the story of creation – how God created man and woman. God created man and created for him a help meet by taking a rib from his side and making woman. The record says that Adam called her name Eve because she was the mother of all living. It doesn't say God called her that. Adam called her name EVE. And then in Genesis 5, and verse 2, the record said that God created male and female, male and female created he them, and called their name Adam. In the very first pair that God placed on earth, He gave the name of the husband to the wife. God called their name Adam. Porter said, "Let me have your check - a thousand dollars." Bogard came back in his next speech and said, "Now that doesn't prove anything." He said the word Adam just meant man, that is all in the world it meant. In response, Porter said, "I don't care what it means, I know that names meant something. Jacob meant something, Isaiah meant something, Abraham meant something. Certainly, names had significance. I don't

care what the word Adam means. The fact remains that God said it was THEIR name."



A conversation took place in the early 1800's at what is now Bethany, West Virginia (Brooke County) between Robert Owen, noted skeptic of the nineteenth century, and Alexander Campbell, gospel preacher. Owen and Campbell were at Bethany, Campbell's home, planning their upcoming debate. One day, as they were out walking while discussing plans for the debate, they came to Campbell's family cemetery. Owen stopped, turned to Campbell and said, "There is one advantage I have over the Christians – I am not afraid to die. Most Christians have fear in death, but if some few items of my business were settled, I should be perfectly willing to die at any moment." Campbell then answered, "You say you have no fear in death: have you any hope in death?" After a solemn pause Owen answered, "No." "Then," rejoined Campbell (pointing to an ox standing near), "You are on the level with that brute. He has fed till he is satisfied, and stands in the shade whisking off the flies, and has neither hope nor fear in death." Unable to reply, Owen could do no more than smile as he conceded the correctness of his new friend's logic.

Church History

The Church at the End of the First Century

By Andy Sochor | Kentucky, USA

The apostles were directly guided by the Holy Spirit. They understood and appreciated the severity of the consequences they would face for changing the Lord's message. Therefore, their teaching was consistent. This is why Paul taught the same thing "everywhere in every church" (1 Corinthians 4:17).

As we noticed in the previous article under this section, Jesus promised to build His church (Matthew 16:18) and it was established on the day of Pentecost following His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension into heaven (Acts 2). As Paul explained, the Lord's church was "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone" (Ephesians 2:20).

The apostles played a vital role in the establishment and growth of the early church. They were the Lord's "ambassadors" (2 Corinthians 5:20) – the official spokesman for the Lord to deliver His perfect and complete will to His people. In order to carry out this role, they were given the promise of the Holy Spirit who would "guide [them] into all the truth" (John 16:13) and "bring to [their] remembrance" everything Jesus said (John 14:26). The Spirit would "testify about [Jesus]" so the apostles could then "testify" to others (John 15:26). They would not have to rely on imperfect communication channels or their own fallible memories to be able to share the Lord's message – they would be miraculously guided by the Holy Spirit so that they could deliver the perfect word of God to others.

As the apostles went about preaching the word, they were not at liberty to establish their own doctrine or alter the teachings that came from the Lord. Paul described the severe penalty that existed for anyone – even the apostles – who would preach a message that was different from the gospel of Christ: "But even if

we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!" (Galatians 1:8-9).

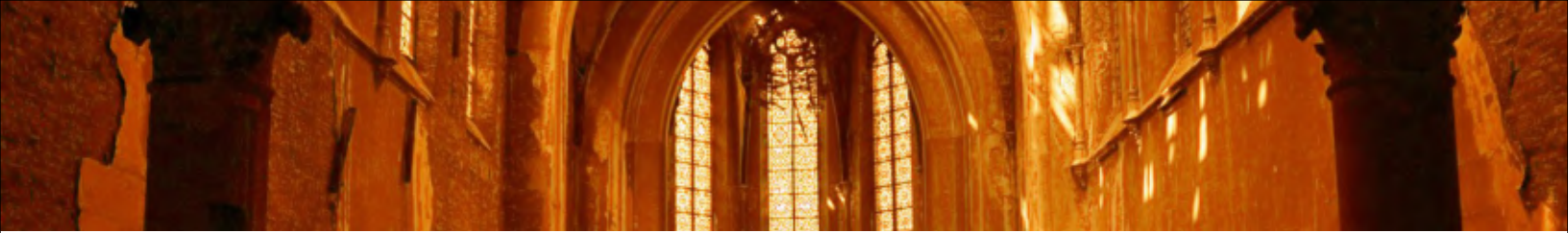
The apostles were directly guided by the Holy Spirit. They understood and appreciated the severity of the consequences they would face for changing the Lord's message. Therefore, their teaching was consistent. This is why Paul taught the same thing "everywhere in every church" (1 Corinthians 4:17).

Because of this, during the first century when the apostles were still present to lead and teach the early Christians, the characteristics of Christ's church that we noticed in the previous article would have been mostly consistent among congregations. To briefly review what we discussed previously, the New Testament describes these characteristics of the Lord's church: [For more on each of these points, see the article from the previous issue.]

- **The work of the church** – evangelism (1 Thessalonians 1:8), edification (Ephesians 4:16), and limited benevolence (Acts 4:32-37; 11:29-30).

- **The worship of the church** – singing (Colossians 3:16), praying (1 Corinthians 14:15), and preaching or teaching (1 Corinthians 14:26), observing the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26) and giving (1 Corinthians 16:1-2).

- **The organization of the church** – elders and



-deacons (Acts 14:23; Philippians 1:1).

- **The message of the church** – the truth of the gospel (1 Timothy 3:15), holding fast to this pattern (2 Timothy 1:13).

This was very different from what we are familiar with in our time. Today, there are a countless number of different churches around us. Each of these churches has their own name, set of doctrines, unique practices, and organizational structure. The churches that existed in the first century were nothing like that. They could all be accurately called “*churches of Christ*” (Romans 16:16) because they belonged to Him, wore no one else's name, and they followed His word as it was taught by His apostles.

Of course, even during the first century, there were false teachers and problems in local churches that needed to be corrected. This is apparent when we read through the New Testament – especially the epistles. But for a while, error was the exception, not the rule.

Warnings of a Coming Apostasy

However, while there was greater unity during the time of the apostles, these spokesmen for Christ warned of a great departure from the faith that would arise. At the close of the first century, error was beginning to spread in different places; yet a time would be coming when this apostasy would be widespread. Let us consider some of these warnings that are contained in the New Testament.

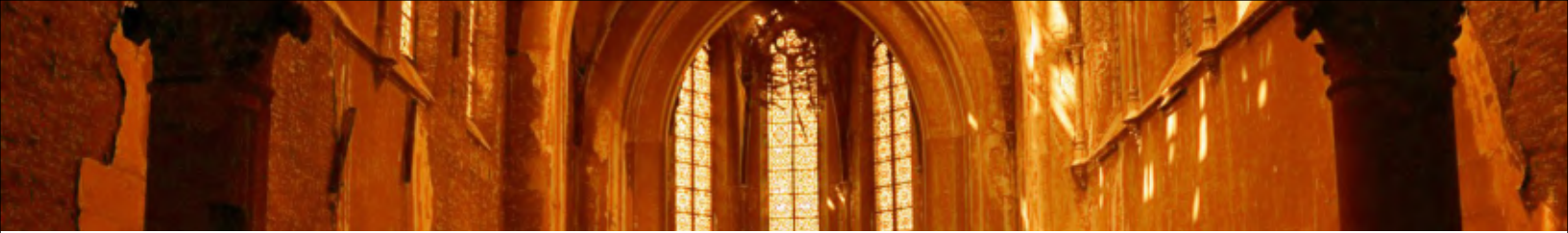
“Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them”

(Acts 20:28-30).

During Paul's final meeting with the elders from the church at Ephesus, he reminded them of their responsibility to shepherd the flock and oversee the church among them. However, Paul warned that there would be trouble coming from outside of the church (evil influences and persecution). There would also be trouble coming from within the church as some Christians – even elders in the church – would teach things contrary to the message of Christ and would build a following for themselves.

“But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth” (1 Timothy 4:1-3).

As Paul relayed the Spirit's message to Timothy, he did not say that apostasy was possible; rather, he said that the Spirit explicitly said that it would happen. Interestingly, the Spirit warned of two specific errors that would be promoted by these false teachers – forbidding marriage (from those who had a God-given right to marry) and restricting the eating of certain foods which God permitted. In either case, the false teachers would be *adding commandments* to the word of God. By doing this, their message would fall under the classification of the “*doctrines of demons.*” We sometimes think of apostasy as *falling short* of God's requirements. Yet this shows that apostasy can also occur when one goes beyond God's requirements. As John wrote, these people “[go] too far and [do] not abide in the teaching of Christ” (2 John 9).



“Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths” (2 Timothy 4:2-4).

Timothy's responsibility – and the responsibility of every gospel preacher today – was to *“preach the word.”* However, Paul explained that not everyone would want to hear the plain, simple message of the gospel. Sadly, the same condition exists today. Those who were not content to *“retain the standard of sound words”* (2 Timothy 1:13) would find teachers who would deliver the message that they wanted to hear. The reason why error spreads is because there are many people who prefer a message that conforms to their desires rather than the message that is in harmony with the will of God.

“Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God. Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things?” (2 Thessalonians 2:3-5).

There were some in Thessalonica who had been led to believe that the return of Christ had already taken place (2 Thessalonians 2:1-2). Yet Paul explained that the *“day of the Lord”* would not happen until *“the apostasy”* occurred. This was not referring to one Christian falling away, a single congregation departing from the truth, or a handful of brethren

adopting some false doctrine. Instead, Paul warned about *the* apostasy – a time of widespread departures from the standard handed down by the Lord through His apostles, with the result that *many* brethren and *many* congregations would no longer be following Christ. Instead, they would be following a *“different gospel”* (cf. Galatians 1:6). Once this apostasy occurred, it would continue to grow and eventually give rise to the myriad of denominations that we see in the world today.

Summary

In general, the church at the end of the first century generally reflected the Lord's pattern handed down by His apostles. Yet false doctrines and departures from the faith were occurring in various places. While the apostles were still alive, they warned of *the* apostasy that was coming. Moving beyond the first century, we will see how this apostasy manifested itself as churches, in large part, began to fall away from the standard found in the New Testament.

WHOLE ARMOR OF GOD



BARBS WITH A POINT

What America Needs

By Ken Weliever | Florida, USA

During the past couple of days, I've been listening to politicians, political pundits, and experts from various fields discuss the "why" of the recent school shooting in Uvalde, Texas that snuffed out the lives of 19 innocent little children.

This occurred just 10 days after a gunman went on a shooting rampage at a Tops supermarket in Buffalo, New York where 10 people were shot and killed whose only crime was going grocery shopping.

Why are there so many of these mass shootings in America?

Of course, the point is made that in some of our larger cities murder is a common occurrence every weekend. According to Chicago Police, 178 people have been killed in 2022 through the end of April.

Why? And what can we do to stop these senseless crimes?

Predictably, calls are made for stricter gun laws. Many have said we have a mental health crisis in America that needs to be addressed. Others suggest more armed security officers in schools, and even allowing teachers to carry guns. Most are demanding hardening soft targets like schools.

While there is some validity to all the various reasons and suggestions given by the experts, our problems go beyond gun control, mental health, or greater security.

So, what's the answer?

I could not help but reflect on a statement made by our 30th President Calvin Coolidge in his 1921 commencement address at Wheaton College.

"We do not need more material development, we need more spiritual

development, we do not need more intellectual power, we need more moral power. We do not need more knowledge, we need more character. We do not need more government, we need more culture. We do not need more laws, we need more religion. We do not need more of the things that are seen, we need more of the things that are unseen."

We are facing a spiritual crisis in our country.

The farther people get away from God and the precepts and principles of His Word, the more wicked, corrupt, and lawless they become. This can be seen all the way back to Genesis when "every intention and thoughts of man's heart was evil continually" (Gen. 6:5). The sad state of moral putridity during the period of the Judges is encapsulated in a single statement, "Everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Jud. 21:25).

We live in a country of broken homes where there is no moral guidance of a father and a mother. Where same-sex marriage is celebrated. Where the sanctity of human life is devalued. Where 63 million babies have been murdered since 1973 when Roe v Wade became law. Where there are more pornographic websites than McDonalds. Where drug and alcohol abuse is rampant. Where God is mocked. And where Christianity is ridiculed.

Add to this the incessant drumbeat over the past 50-60 years that there are no moral absolutes. That Truth is decided by what's best for me and that your truth may not be my truth. And the humanistic view that religious considerations should be excluded from civil

affairs and public education.

Mix in these issues, the problem of insolation, loneliness, devaluing social interaction and relationships, and an inordinate amount of time looking at a screen, and here we are today.

Bill Bennett's observation in his 1990's best-seller, "The Book of Virtues," is more applicable than ever. "I submit to you that the real crisis of our time is spiritual." Furthermore, Bennett asserts "A human being without faith, without reverence for anything, is a human being morally adrift."

There is no doubt that America needs a course correction. Of course, in an election year, we're assured electing the right candidate will solve our problems. But as Cal Thomas once wrote in *Christianity Today*, "Real change comes heart by heart, not election by-election, because our primary problems are not economic and political, but moral and spiritual."

While the tone of the post, may sound rather bleak and our problems insurmountable, there is help. And there is hope.

It begins in my heart. My home. My community. And my church. I cannot solve all the problems of the world, but I can be accountable to God. Take personal responsibility. Commit to Biblical values. And do my best each day to practice the Golden Rule and the two great commandments.

You and I may not change our country, but we can change our own little corner of the world.



BAPTISM AND SALVATION

In Acts 22: 16, Ananias said to Saul of Tarsus, "*And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.*" We are repeatedly told that baptism isn't essential to salvation. Some say that all one has to do to be saved is just believe in Jesus. Others tell us that if you will say some "*sinner's prayer, and invite Jesus into your heart you will be saved.*"

It is obvious, that Saul believed in Jesus, when He appeared to him on the road to Damascus. There Jesus said to him, "*Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.*" (Acts 9: 6). Saul obeyed and went into Damascus, and was there three days. He did not eat or drink, and was praying. Ananias then came to him and told him what he MUST do. What did he tell him? Did he tell him to just believe in Jesus? No, he told him to "*Arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.*" Acts 9: 18 says that Saul "*Arose, and was baptized.*"

But, we are told that "*water baptism has nothing to do with salvation, only the blood of Jesus can wash away one's sins.*" It is true that only the blood of Jesus can wash away one's sin (Rev. 1: 5; Matt. 26: 28). But when, or at what point, does Jesus' blood wash away one's sin? When, or at what point, does one receive the remission of sins? Clearly, it is when one is baptized (Acts 22: 16; 2: 38).

Thus, Saul of Tarsus was not told to "*stay down and pray,*" which he had been doing for three days, and he was not told to invite Jesus into his heart and he would be saved, but he was told to "*get up and be baptized.*" Why? To "*wash away his sins!*" Therefore, Jesus' blood washed away, (remitted) Saul's sins when he was baptized. If not, why not? Has Jesus' blood washed away your sins? Think on these things.

–Dennis Abernathy

Institutionalism

“A Graduate Of Any Recognized Bible College”

By Osamagbe Lesley EGHAREVBA | Lagos, Nigeria

I look forward to when we will have an announcement like this: “We are seeking for a faithful and God-fearing man who is scripturally sound, able to teach and have a good report among the brethren who would be willing to work with us as preacher in our congregation”

In the past few years, I have seen several letters from different congregations of the Lord's church in Nigeria requesting for the service of a gospel preacher. Most of these letters are often filled with qualifications that I consider unnecessary and sometimes unscriptural. For example, I have seen an announcement that states that an interested candidate must have a Bachelor's Degree in any Arts/Social Science courses. I have seen those that insist that the preacher must be married, etc. but there is one particular qualification that is usually in almost all the circulars that I have seen – the interested candidate must be a graduate of any recognized Bible College. There is hardly any circular that this qualification does not appear and this is the very qualification that I wish to address in this piece.


Books have been written by brethren that advocate that graduates of Bible colleges are better in preaching than those who have not attended any Bible college and that churches must focus on the colleges since they are busy churning out graduates for the churches (I reviewed a few of such books in an article in 2021 pointing out the loopholes in them). Without any animosity towards Bible colleges or their graduates, may I suggest that the above statement is not true. I was born and raised in the church and I have met quite a number of preachers in Nigeria and some others whose works I have been privileged to read. Suffice to say that I see no sound reason or basis for the claim that a graduate of Bible college is better in the scriptures or preaching than a person who has not

been to one. I am not trying to relegate the college but from the scriptural perspective, I must be emphatic that a man is not required or mandated to attend a Bible college in order to be qualified to preach; and I challenge anyone who thinks otherwise to prove it.

I am not opposing the right of colleges to exist and teach people neither am I opposing the right of people to attend any college of their choice. However, I am opposing the practice of insisting that a man must have attended a Bible college before he would be qualified to work as a preacher in the church of the Lord. In other words, I am saying that it is not the responsibility of any human institution to train preachers for the church and churches should not focus or rely on them for preachers.

From practical experiences, Bible colleges in Nigeria have even done more harm than good and this is a fact that is too plain to be denied. But the aim of this writing is not to delve into the pitfalls of these colleges (I addressed that in the previous article I mentioned earlier). Rather it is to show that there are a number of things wrong with the practice of churches depending on colleges for preachers. When a church sends out an announcement and insists that a man that they desire to have as a preacher must be someone who is a graduate of any recognized Bible colleges, I believe that there are certain things that are wrong with that. They include but not limited to the following.

First, it places the job of “recognition” into the hands of humans. Note that the announcement usually says



that the interested candidate must be a graduate of a “recognized” Bible college. But who is to “recognize” the Bible college? Is it the Bible or the church? As far as I know, the Bible speaks of no Bible college and that means the Bible does not recognize any college for training of the preacher apart from the local church. Now, if the church is to do the “recognition,” by what authority does she do these things and who gave her such authority? And what if a Bible college starts teaching false doctrine, will they still be recognized? And who will call them to order?

Second, it places the responsibility of training preachers in the hands of the college rather than the church. Paul writes to Timothy, a gospel preacher and says in II Timothy 2:2; *“And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.”* This proves that it is the job of faithful gospel preachers to train other men to become preachers in the congregation.

Third, it indicates the church is insufficient: The Bible says the church is the pillar and ground of the truth; *“but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.”* The Bible college is NOT the pillar and ground of the truth and there is no better place to be taught the truth than in the pillar and the ground of the truth. So, I wonder when brethren say that Bible colleges are better in training preachers than the church. Such statement is indirectly relegating the church of the Lord.

Fourth, it ignores the Bible in selecting the qualifications. I do not know of any Bible passage that instructs that a person must have attended a Bible college to become a preacher. If there is no such

passage, then why are churches insisting on such? Some have tried to explain away this error by saying that each church is autonomous and so they are free to take any decision and decide on any qualification they want to. Well, while it is true that each church is autonomous, I believe that making human requirements for workers in God's kingdom is going beyond what is written. Perhaps, if men like Timothy, Titus, Silas, and even Paul were to be alive today, they would not meet the requirements that most churches set in order for them to become preachers.

I believe that our brethren miss the mark when they turn over the work of training preachers to the Bible colleges and insist that a man must have attended any of these human institutions to be qualified to preach. I look forward to when we will have an announcement like this: “We are seeking for a faithful and God-fearing man who is scripturally sound, able to teach and have a good report among the brethren who would be willing to work with us as preacher in our congregation.” Is this not simple enough?

KNOW WHAT YOU'RE WORKING FOR

continued from pg. 15

Why are we doing what we're doing when it comes to our labors? There are many good things we can do through our labors – provide for our own (1 Timothy 5:8), help others (Ephesians 4:28), give to the church (1 Corinthians 16:2), and so on. But if we're just working for the sake of working, eventually we will find it meaningless.

So know what you're working for. Wanting to work hard does not justify wasting time in meaningless endeavors. Recognize what's important and work hard for that.

–Andy Sochor



Myth Buster

Judge Not, That Ye Be Not Judged

By Emmanuel Oluwatoba | Niger, Nigeria

Many Christians shy away from the duty of correcting the erring for fear of being accused of being judgmental. And this has contributed to the increasing moral decay in our societies and even in the church, which is to be presented holy and without blemish (Eph. 5:20).

The book of Matthew 7 verse 1 says “*judge not, that ye be not judged*”. This passage is one of the most misused, misquoted and misunderstood passages of the Bible. It has sadly become an armor for Christians and non-Christians alike who hate to be rebuked of sin. Often when one rebukes sinners, his rebuke is often met with the response “judge not!”, “don't judge me”. Many Christians now shy away from the duty of correcting the erring for fear of being accused of being judgmental. And this has contributed to the increasing moral decay in our societies and even in the church, which is to be presented holy and without blemish (Eph 5:20). The question on the minds of Christians when we read this passage is “Should Christians judge others?”, “Is it wrong to discern that someone's conduct is sinful?”, “How should we judge?”

The Greek word for “judge” is “*krino*” and can be translated as “to pronounce an opinion concerning right and wrong”, to “condemn”, to be “of opinion”, “deem”, “think” (the KJV New Testament Greek Lexicon). The word judge appears many times in the scriptures and can have both negative and positive application depending on the context.

On the surface this passage seems to be a prohibition of judgment in totality, but that is not what Jesus intended. Taking this passage that way shows a very narrow view of the concept of judging and ignorance of other scriptures that says we are to judge.

How We Should Not Judge!

1. We are not to condemn others: the book of Luke

6:37 gives perspective to Jesus' statement here, it adds “*condemn not and ye shall not be condemned*”. Condemnation is one of the negative applications of judgment, we are not to *judge for the purpose of condemning*. Gal 6:1 says “*Brothers, even if someone is caught in some fault, you who are spiritual must restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; looking to yourself so that you are also not tempted*”. We shouldn't make up punishments for people in our minds.


2. We are not to condemn the guiltless: We are not to behave like the Pharisees in Matt 12:1-8, where they were actively condemning the guiltless based on their false standards, we are not to judge outside of the standards provided by God, lest we fall into the sin of judging those who should not be judged.

3. We should not judge the motives of others: we are not to judge the motives of others, because only God knows the heart of man.

4. We are not to judge according to appearance: Jesus said, “*Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with a righteous judgment*” (John 7:24). Appearance can be deceiving and when we base our judgments on it, we often end up being guilty of judging wrongly.

Should Christians Judge?

YES, we are to judge, in fact, Jesus says we should judge, however, He included a clause for our judgment, we are to “**judge with a righteous judgment**” (John 7:24). In Acts 5:1-4, Peter came to the conclusion that a man was in sin and he rebuked



him. Paul in Gal. 2:11-14, rebuked Peter for his hypocrisy. Paul also judged in 1 Cor. 5:3. From these passages, it is clear that Christians can indeed judge.

James 5:19-20 says, “*Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death and shall hide a multitude of sin*”. How do we convert an erring one without first judging that he has erred?

1 Corinthians 5: 11-12 says, “*But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat. For what have I to judge them also that are without? Do you not judge them that are within?*” Here Paul tells Christians to judge themselves and take actions against those who continue in sinfulness.

From all these passages, we ought to judge, but only in the right way. We are not to condone sinfulness and we are to judge the actions of one another to ensure that we are in the right path with God. Remember we are to “**provoke each other to good works**” (Heb. 10:24).

The Log in Your Own Eyes

Matthew 7:4-5 says “*Or how will you tell your brother, 'let me remove the speck from your eye,' and look, the log is in your own eyes? You hypocrite. First remove the log out of your own eye, and then you can see clearly to remove the speck out of your brother's eye.*” Many conclude that it would be wrong to judge since Paul says “all have sinned” (Rom. 3:23). It should be noted that the Corinthian church which Paul wrote to disfellowship an erring brother had members who were guilty of the sins of envy, strife and divisions

(1 Cor. 1:11-2), and taking the body of the Lord unworthily (1 Cor. 11:17-30). From this we can see that such conclusion is not only false but indeed dangerous. Hebrews 3:13 says “*but exhort one another day by day, so long as it is called “today”, lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin*”. How do we guard against sin if we all refuse to admonish, rebuke and correct each other?

Again, Jesus was referring to the negative type of judgment, as in Matthew 8:7-11. Jesus wasn't setting a standard where sinners are not to be judged, instead he was setting a standard against condemnation, for He judged that she was indeed guilty of sin when he said “**Go, and sin no more**”. Jesus was addressing the Pharisees who had more concern for the sins of others, than they did with their own righteousness, Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for hypocrisy many times (Matt. 23:14-15, 23:23-29). Jesus was only emphasizing the need for judgment to start from within, so that we may correct the erring with a good conscience, as 1 Corinthians 11:31 says “*now if we judged ourselves correctly, we would not be judged*”.

Conclusion

As Christians, we have a duty of correcting one another in the spirit of love and we are meant to uphold this duty. However, we should not judge with the wrong intents, rather all our judgments should be that which gives glory to God.

Ideal Home

Teaching the Next Generation

By Andy Sochor | Kentucky, USA

Naturally, we want the next generation to be faithful to the Lord. John wrote, "I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth" (3 John 4). Let us be sure we are teaching the next generation – not only what we believe, teach, and practice, but also why we believe, teach, and practice these things – so that they might also walk in the truth.

It has been said before that the church is just one generation away from apostasy. This is certainly true. While there are exceptions to any rule, generally what the wise man said is accurate: *"Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it"* (Proverbs 22:6). If we want children to follow the way of truth when they grow up, they must be taught the way of truth while they are growing up.

As we raise the next generation, we should focus on this question: ***Why do we believe, teach, and practice what we do?*** This is important. We are to *"please [God] in all respects"* (Colossians 1:10). The next generation must be taught to please God as well. But if we do not teach them how to do this, what will they do when they are grown?

To answer that question, consider what happened with the generation that rose up after Joshua and the sons of Israel conquered the land of Canaan:

"All that generation also were gathered to their fathers; and there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord, nor yet the work which He had done for Israel. Then the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals, and they forsook the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed themselves down to them; thus they provoked the Lord to anger" (Judges 2:10-12).

Notice what the new generation of Israelites did – they did evil, forsook the Lord, served the false gods of the people around them, and provoked the Lord to anger. Why would they do this? They *"did not know the Lord"* (Judges 2:10). Regardless of whether this was due to a failure of the previous generation to teach or a failure of the new generation to listen, this still provides us with an important reminder of how vital it is for knowledge of the truth to be passed down from one generation to another. When it is not passed down, apostasy is inevitable.

So let us again consider the question stated earlier: ***Why do we believe, teach, and practice what we do?*** It is not sufficient to simply pass down what we believe, teach, and practice (though this is also important). We must impress upon the next generation the reasons *why* we believe, teach, and practice what we do. It is important that we teach the next generation the right reasons so as to promote continued faithfulness. If we teach the wrong reasons (either explicitly or implicitly), the danger of apostasy will be even greater.

First, let us consider some wrong reasons for doing what we do in service to God:

- **It is a tradition** – Often people will hold to religious practices and doctrines because they grew up with them. But we should not do anything simply because we have always done it that way. Some traditions, the ones given to us in the word of God (2 Thessalonians



2:15), must be kept – not because of mere tradition, but because they are right. Some traditions are contrary to the word of God and must be rejected (Matthew 15:3-6). Other traditions are harmless – neither commanded nor condemned – but must never be bound upon others (Matthew 15:1-2). Our standard must be truth, not tradition.

- **It is our preference** – Many people will simply follow their conscience, believing that there are many paths that lead to heaven. But the wise man warned: *“There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death”* (Proverbs 14:12). Jesus is the only way to heaven (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). He promises to save those who *“obey Him”* (Hebrews 5:9). Our prayer should be that God's will be done (Matthew 6:10) rather than selfishly seeking our own desires. Our standard must be God's preference, not our preference.

- **Others are doing it** – One of the reasons why Israel rejected God and asked for a king was so that they could **“be like all the nations”** (1 Samuel 8:20). This desire to be like the world has plagued God's people throughout history. Yet we are to be different. Paul wrote, *“And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind”* (Romans 12:2). Our standard must be the *word*, not the *world*.

- **Other churches of Christ are doing it** – The church belongs to Christ (Matthew 16:18; Acts 20:28; Ephesians 1:22-23; 5:23-24). When Paul referred to the local churches with which he was associated, he called them *“churches of Christ”* (Romans 16:16). However, we should not think that just because a congregation wears the name “church of Christ” that they are sound and should be emulated. This is a denominational concept. Wearing a name alone does not save. The church in Sardis had *“a name that [they*

were] alive, but [they were] dead” (Revelation 3:1). Many “churches of Christ” teach and practice things that are foreign to the New Testament. Our standard must be the head of the church, not fallible humans in the church.

In contrast, let us notice the right reasons for doing what we do:

- **It is commanded** – Jesus possesses *“all authority”* (Matthew 28:18). Therefore, we must *“observe all that [He] commanded”* (Matthew 28:20). This does not just include the words He spoke while on earth that are recorded in the first four books of the New Testament. It includes *all* that is commanded to us in the New Testament. Paul said, *“The things which I write to you are the Lord's commandment”* (1 Corinthians 14:37; cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:2; 2 Peter 3:2).

- **It is authorized** – Paul said, *“Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus”* (Colossians 3:17). To do something *“in the name of the Lord”* is to do it by His authority. It is not enough for us to do whatever we choose and then claim that it is for the Lord. Jesus said, *“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. Many will say to Me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness”* (Matthew 7:21-23). It is not enough to simply believe in Jesus and be religious. We must respect Him enough to do what He has authorized us to do.

- **It is expedient** – When we think about expedients, we must understand that something must first be



authorized before it can be claimed to be *expedient*. Paul said, “*All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient*” (1 Corinthians 10:23, KJV). Once we understand what has been commanded of us and what is authorized, we can then look to determine the most helpful/profitable way of doing what is commanded and authorized. We should not allow tradition to hinder us from engaging in better ways of doing things. On the other hand, we must be careful that those “better” ways that we call “expedients” do not go beyond what has been authorized in God's word.

All of the points above can be summarized in this statement: **We must follow the word of God in all that we do.** “*To the law and to the testimony!*” (Isaiah 8:20). The Scriptures are our standard and we must diligently follow what they teach.

Naturally, we want the next generation to be faithful to the Lord. John wrote, “*I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth*” (3 John 4). Let us be sure we are teaching the next generation – not only what we believe, teach, and practice, but also *why* we believe, teach, and practice these things – so that they might also walk in the truth.

FAITHFULNESS

God is faithful and He expects His people to be faithful (1 Cor. 1: 9; 10: 13; Rev. 2: 10). God's Word speaks of “*faithful*” servants (Matt. 25: 21), “*faithful*” ministers (Col. 4: 7), “*faithful*” brethren (Col. 1: 2), “*faithful*” children (Tit. 1: 6), and “*faithful*” in the Lord (1 Cor. 4: 17). These “*faithful*” passages are pointers to that Day when our Lord, who is faithful, will say: “*Well done, thou good and faithful servant...enter into the joy of your Lord*” (Matt. 25: 21). But, for the lazy and unfaithful servant it will be a

different verdict. That one will be “*cast into outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth*” (Matt. 25: 35).

It is sad what churches do to promote faithfulness among their members. They reward and socialize, coax and tantalize church members into doing things they really don't want to do, but what they would do if they truly loved God! But only faithful service counts with God. Large crowds that are drawn with loaves and fishes, and all sorts of gimmicks, does not “*faithful*” Christians make! Remember, faith comes from the Word of God (Rom. 10: 17).

The evidence of true faith is “*faithfulness.*” Not everyone can be great song directors or preachers, but all can be faithful. We may not all be equal in talent, but we all can be equal in effort! So, whatever talent we possess, little or great, we must use it in the service of God. All that God expects is that we do our best. Of a woman, we read of in Mk. 14: 8, Jesus said: “*She hath done what she could.*” Yes, a little thing is a little thing, but faithfulness in a little thing is a great thing as far as God is concerned! Fanny J. Crosby, the blind song writer, penned the followed words:

*“When Jesus comes to reward His servants,
Whether it is noon or night,
Faithful to Him will He find us watching,
With our lamps all trimmed and bright?*

*If at the dawn of the early morning,
He shall call us one by one,
When to the Lord we restore our talents,
Will He answer thee, Well done?”*

—Think on these things.

—Dennis Abernathy

SALVATION

How God Turned A Curse Into A Blessing

By Rowland Femi Gbamis | Ontario, Canada

"Then Moses stood at the camp entrance and said, "Whoever is on the Lord's side—come to me!" And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together to him" (Exodus 32:26 NKJV).

Introduction

All human beings love success and pray to be spared failure in life. However, not every success is good and not every failure is terrible. There are times when failure in a venture turns out to be in the better interest of him who fails. Let us, for in a moment, see how God turned a curse into a blessing. Jacob, the patriarch of the Israelite nation, had once cursed his son Levi for his fierce anger and cruel wrath (Gen. 49:5-7). If yours seem to be an unpleasant lot in life and you badly wish to exchange your curse for a blessing, borrow a leaf from Levi. No one ever imagined Levi, the third of the twelve sons of Jacob, becoming the ancestor of a priestly tribe known for its dedication to Tabernacle worship among the Israelites (cf. Num. 3:5-9).

Prelude

In Chapter 34 of Genesis, we read of a horrendous incident involving Leah's daughter, Dinah, who goes out into one of the Hivite cities herself, and Shechem rapes her. The case of Shechem is that of a misplaced passion of a heathen young man who sees a fair lady, and he was attracted to her physically. Shechem's behaviour among the ungodly is not uncalled for because he is not a Jew; hence he is not bound by any known laws that prohibit him from such action. As far as Shechem is concerned, he was deeply attracted to Dinah (v.3) because of her beauty and consequently, he raped Dinah! Today, it is not surprising that God's children, particularly our sisters, are still being admired by the unbeliever and the ungodly because of their unholy alliance with the world's people (1 Cor.15:33; 2 Cor. 6:14-18-emphasis mine). As God's

children, the people we associate with matter a lot. Accordingly, while Jacob and his sons heard of the rape of Dinah, Shechem and Hamor, his father, all agree to rectify the situation with Jacob.

Then Hamor the father of Shechem went out to Jacob to speak with him. And the sons of Jacob came in from the field when they heard it; and the men were grieved and very angry, because he had done a disgraceful thing in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter, a thing which ought not to be done. But Hamor spoke with them, saying, "The soul of my son Shechem longs for your daughter. Please give her to him as a wife. And make marriages with us; give your daughters to us, and take our daughters to yourselves. So you shall dwell with us, and the land shall be before you. Dwell and trade in it, and acquire possessions for yourselves in it." Then Shechem said to her father and her brothers, "Let me find favor in your eyes, and whatever you say to me I will give. Ask me ever so much dowry and gift, and I will give according to what you say to me; but give me the young woman as a wife." (Gen. 34: 6-12).

Unfortunately, despite all the pleas, Simeon and Levi had a scheme to settle the rift through a brutal and well-orchestrated plan. The two sons of Jacob- Levi and Simeon deceptively lured their in-laws-to-be by



catching in on their words, "marry our children, and we will marry your children." The deed is done! Simeon and Levi say in their minds: "We agree if all of the males in the city of Shechem will be circumcised"(Gen. 34: 13-19). While the men are still in pain from the circumcision, Simeon and Levi, the brothers of Dinah, go in and kill with their swords every male in the city who was circumcised (vv. 25-27). They looted everything in the city: "They took their sheep, oxen, donkeys, what was in the city and what was in the field, and all their wealth. All their little ones and their wives they took captive; they plundered even all that was in the houses.

Action And Consequence

Levi and Simeon incurred their godly father's curse upon themselves because of what they did in the city of Shechem in Canaan when Jacob came from Padan Aram and pitched his tent before the city (Gen. 33:18).

Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, "You have troubled me by making me obnoxious among the land inhabitants, the Canaanites and the Perizzites; and since I am few, they will gather themselves together against me and kill me. I shall be destroyed, my household and I." But they said, "Should he treat our sister like a harlot?" (34:30-31).

For the above reason, when Jacob was about to die, he gathered all his children to pronounce prophetic blessings. While others, apart from Reuben, got their various blessings, Levi and Simeon got cursed due to their actions.

"Simeon and Levi are brothers; Instruments of cruelty are in their dwelling place. Let not my soul enter

their council; Let not my honor be united to their assembly; For in their anger they slew a man, And in their self-will, they hamstrung an ox. Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce; And their wrath, for it is cruel! I will divide them in Jacob; And scatter them in Israel (Gen. 49:5-7).

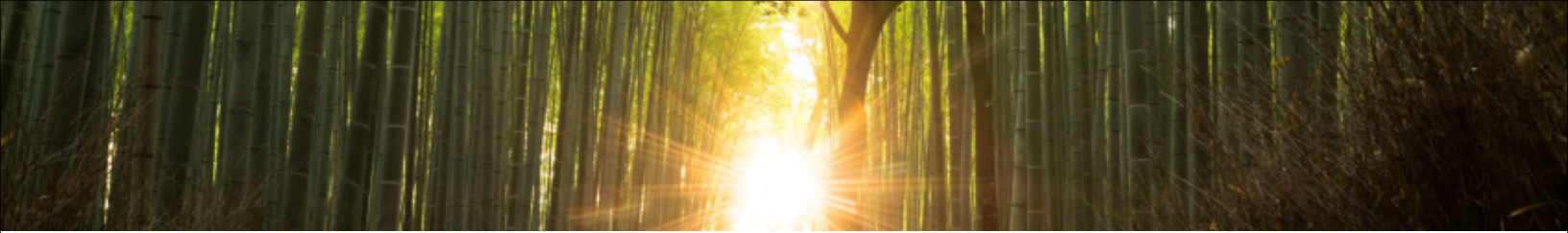
Consequently, their descendants would be fugitives scattered over the land. As for Simeon, the curse took its natural course. However, it was not so with Levi and his descendants. Levi's descendants were scattered among their kins but not as hopeless fugitives according to the curse. Instead, the Levites became honoured ambassadors of the Almighty Jehovah in all Israel:

At that time, the Lord separated the tribe of Levi to bear the ark of the covenant of the Lord, to stand before the Lord to minister to Him and to bless in His name, to this day. Therefore, Levi has no portion nor inheritance with his brethren; the Lord is his inheritance, just as the Lord your God promised him (Deut. 10:8-9).

There could not have been a more enviable spiritual status for Levi anywhere at any time, yet Levi and his descendants had it!

The Turning Point

Several questions come to mind: How did the change come about? How come that cursed Levi suddenly became the blessed? What turned the fugitive into an honourable ambassador of the King of kings? The turning point came when God called Moses up to the top of a mountain to receive the written law for Israel. However, because Moses' return was delayed, the



Israelites formed an image which they worshipped as their God under the leadership of Aaron (Exo. 32:1-4). On his return to the camp, Moses destroyed the image that Aaron had moulded for them and demanded: "Who is on the Lord's side? Let him come unto me" (Exo. 32:26)! Remarkably, only the sons of Levi signified their loyalty to God by moving to Moses' side, and that was the turning point in their lives. From that moment onward, God began to turn their curse into blessings. All because they changed sides from idolatry to total allegiance to the true and only one God. The latter is the only condition for God to turn man's curse into a blessing (John 3: 16; Acts 2: 37-38).

Call To Action

Moses proclaims: "Who is on the Lord's side? Let him come unto me!" Herein lies the decision that everyone must decide. We either obey God to be on His side of obedience or toll the part of our fleshly desires. (Rom. 6:12, 16). One needs to declare for the Lord as against the devil and the world (1 John 2:15-17). Your past may be dark, stained with crimes and guilt that still haunt your soul. However, if you come to the Lord's side, God will cleanse your past and give you a new life and a new place of service in His vineyard. Are you under a curse? All those who are not Christians are cursed with God's wrath hanging loosely over them (2 Thess. 1:7-9). Lastly, our God is still in the business of turning people's curses into a blessing through the Lord Jesus Christ (Mark 16:15-16; John 14:6; Acts 4:12). Are you ready today to be transformed into his likeness who died for you? If so, take God's precious word and by believing and receiving all of its instructions, repent of your sins; confess that Jesus Christ is the son of God; and then be buried and raised with Jesus in the water of baptism for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38).

DELIGHT IN UNDERSTANDING

Many times in the book of Proverbs, the wise man warned us not to be like the fool. Often this term was used to describe one who *rejects* knowledge. In most instances, it was more than just one who *lacks* knowledge (those who are naive).

One of the many negative character traits of the fool described by the wise man is this: "*A fool does not delight in understanding, but only in revealing his own mind*" (Proverbs 18:2).

A fool needs understanding, but he does not see his need for instruction. This arrogance not only leads him to think he needs no instruction, it also causes him to think so highly of himself that he believes that others need to hear his opinion.

This has always been a problem, but it seems to be more pronounced during the age of social media. There is a great temptation on these platforms to simply spout off every opinion we have of every issue rather than seek to grow in our understanding. However, that is what the fool does.

So delight in understanding. Have the humility to recognize that you have more to learn. Seek to listen, learn, and *then* humbly make a wiser and more helpful response.

—Andy Sochor

Salvation

How Can A Person Work Righteousness?

By Osamagbe Lesley EGHAREVBA | Lagos, Nigeria

Then Peter opened his mouth and said: "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him (Acts 10:34-35).

The religion of Christ requires that one must do something before he can be saved. Cornelius was told by the angel to send for Peter who "will tell you what you must do" (Acts 10:6). When Peter got to the house of Cornelius, he declared that "*In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him*" (Acts 10:34-35). This Bible passage clearly proves that one must do something (work righteousness) before he can be accepted by God. Unfortunately, many religious groups today teach the exact opposite by insisting that men are to be saved by faith only.

Since the Bible also teaches that only the righteous will make it to heaven on the last day (Matthew 25:46), what that means is that one has to work righteousness in order to be righteous. And so, it is important for everyone to understand what righteousness is and how can a person actually work righteousness.

In the first place, it must be stated that a person cannot work righteousness by doing boastful works or works of his own righteousness which Isaiah likened to "filthy rags" (Isaiah 64:6). Ways that seem right to a man can have a destructive end (Proverbs 14:12; 16:25). Ephesian 2:8-9 tells us that we are not saved by boastful works and Titus 3:5 makes it clear that God saved us "not by works of righteousness which we have done." These passages are not contradicting Acts 10:34-35 but when it says we are not saved by works; it refers to works originating from man or of man's device.

Second, a man cannot work righteousness by teaching as doctrines the commandments men. In Matthew 15:8-9, the Bible says "*And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.*" Most religious groups today that have invented new unscriptural things into their worship services are worshipping God in vain. It does not matter whether the invention is good or not, inasmuch as such is not found in the New Testament, those practicing it are deviating from the act of working righteousness (II John 9). Hence, when a man is worshipping God, such must be sure that every act he carries out in his worship to God is authorized by Him by searching the scriptures to see if the practice is there in the scriptures.

Third, a man cannot work righteousness by following the Law of Moses in the Old Testament. Why? Because "*no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin*" (Romans 3:20 - NIV). Please read the following Bible passages (Romans 3:20-28; 6:14-15; 7:4-7; Galatians 3:11, 21) to understand that no man can be justified by obeying the law that God gave by Moses to Israel. That dispensation has passed and even the Law has been changed (Hebrews 7:12) and we are now to obey the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2).

Hence, the only way a person can work righteousness is to hear, believe and obey all of God's commandments (Acts 2:36-47; 3:19-26; Rom. 10:17). This is true because all of God's commandments are righteousness. Psalm 119:172



says; “*My tongue shall speak of Your word, For all Your commandments are righteousness.*” Now, someone may ask; “Are God's commandments not found in the Old Testament?” Yes it is but today in the Christian dispensation, the Bible teaches that God's righteousness is revealed in the gospel: “*For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, “The just shall live by faith.”*” Paul was speaking about the Gospel of Christ and he says that it is God's power unto salvation and that the righteousness of God is revealed in it. If anyone must work righteousness today (that is, obey all of God's commandments that He wants us to obey), such would have to turn to the New Testament to find out about it. On the Mount of Transfiguration, the voice that came from heaven declared that Christ is the beloved Son of God and who we are to listen to; not Moses or Elijah (Matthew 17:5). What that means is that we are not to obey commands given to Moses or to the Israelites, etc. See also Romans 2:16 & James 2:12.

The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men and it teaches us **to do** certain things. We are to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world, looking for that blessed hope (Titus 2:11-14). We must be righteous to be saved. Meanwhile, it is possible for righteous people to fall away when they commit sin (I Corinthians 10:12; Galatians 5:4) but they should not for that is inconsistent with being a Christian (1 John 3:8-9). When a righteous man sins, and he is willing to repent, confess and pray to God for forgiveness (cf. Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:9; James 5:16) such will be forgiven and will continue to be righteous by the grace of God. You may choose to be righteous

but you must submit to God's Will.

Does your religious group teach you to work righteousness or are you deceived that you do not have to do anything to be righteous? The choice is yours. Think on these things!

AVOID CONTROVERSIES WITH FOOLS

In addition to making comparisons between the wise man and the foolish man, the book of Proverbs also warns about our interactions with fools. They could cause harm to us if we are not careful.

One such warning is this: “*When a wise man has a controversy with a foolish man, the foolish man either rages or laughs, and there is no rest*” (Proverbs 29:9). One who is wise understands and has experienced the benefit of controversy – truth is defended, faulty reasoning is exposed, and one who was wrong may be turned to what is right.

However, these benefits only happen when both parties involved in the controversy are open to correction and have an honest heart. This is true of the wise man, not the fool. The fool will either get angry and make personal attacks, or he will disregard the matter as a joke. Nothing good is accomplished.

We need to be careful not to waste our time in controversy with those who are not open to truth and correction (as we should be). Many today seem to only rage and laugh; when this becomes evident, we are not obligated to continue the interaction.

So avoid controversies with fools. Some people are reasonable and honest; others are not. Let's spend our time helping those we can help.

–**Andy Sochor**

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Question

Should disfellowship letters be shared outside of the congregation disfellowshipping someone? Please provide scriptures to support your answer.

Answer

In the New Testament, the church in Ephesus wrote a letter to the brethren in Achaia about a faithful brother, Apollos: "*And when he desired to cross to Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him; and when he arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace;*" (Acts 18:27).

This should prove that a church can write to another to tell them about the conduct of an individual (whether faithful or not). Note that Achaia is a region and Corinth is just a city in that region.

When Ananias and Sapphira were disciplined, the Bible says "*So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things*" (Acts 5:11). This proves that people outside their group heard about it. Whether the church wrote and circulated it, I do not know. But one thing is certain: people heard it! The record of this incident (as well as other incidents of disciplining of God's children when they sinned) are clearly written in the Bible and people today (including unbelievers) can read about the bad attitudes of the individuals who were members of the Lord's church.

The man that took his father's wife in I Corinthians 5 was commanded to be disciplined by the church. When he repented, he was asked to be forgiven and received by the same church in II Corinthians 2. However, these records are still there for us till today. God did not have to exclude that part of the story so we would not see and circulate the evil that was done because the sinner later repented.

The truth is that God always record both the good and

bad actions of men for people to learn. Romans 15:4: "*For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.*" Imagine if all the sins of the Israelites, the hypocrisy of Peter, the persecution of Saul (later known as Paul), etc. were not written to be circulated today?

I believe that the purpose of disfellowship is to make a man repent. Such should be ashamed of himself and then repent. God does not hide the bad side of His people when they err and we (as a church) should not hide it either. Hiding it will make the people outside see us as condoning sin. We are to **mark and avoid** those who cause offences contrary to what we have received (Romans 16:17).

I remember a situation where a preacher was disfellowshipped for sexual sins and an outsider appreciated the church for excommunicating him. He said the church of Christ is not like the other churches that covers the sins of their pastors. That seems like a commendation from an unbeliever and it shows that he recognizes the church of Christ does not condone sin. Imagine if such was done secretly and it was not clearly announced to everyone that the individual was disciplined, what would such say about the church?

Some have wondered why a church has to share a disfellowship letter to different churches or social media but I think that the focus should be on asking why did the individual commit the said sin? People will hear it whether we like it or not. The aim is to let the people know we are not in support of this sin and the sinner! So I think it is not out of place to make such announcement. A church has the discretion to send out letters of disfellowship to those they want to. And if a church chooses not to, she has not sinned. But I think it is expedient to let people know that a bother is "faithful" or "unfaithful" in order to help others.

Addendum

Most Believers Just Do What Is Expected Of Them By Their Congregation

By Patrick Donahue | Alabama, USA

Some churches expect their members to really live a holy lifestyle Monday through Saturday (I Pet 1:16), and some churches don't. The great majority of the members of those churches who expect such usually live a very moral life. And the members of the other type churches (usually a congregation that has fallen for the Once Saved Always Saved deception - II Pet 2:20-22) usually live like those around them that don't even go to church anywhere.

Many understand that children behave according to the expectation of their parents, and most students perform to the level of expectation of their teachers. And I have noticed that most believers do only what is expected of them by the church they attend. II Cor. 10:12 talks about that possibility – “For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.”

For example, when it comes to church attendance, I grew up in a congregation that expected you to be there on Sunday morning, but Sunday night and Wednesday night were like extra credit. I think that's probably why my parents only took us Sunday mornings. But churches that emphasize texts like Heb 10:25 expect their members to be there every service. In congregations like that you rarely see much of a drop off from Sunday am to Sunday or Wednesday pm.

Some churches expect their members to really live a holy lifestyle Monday through Saturday (I Pet 1:16), and some churches don't. The great majority of the members of those churches who expect such usually live a very moral life. And the members of the other type churches (usually a congregation that has fallen for the Once Saved Always Saved deception - II Pet 2:20-22) usually live like those around them that don't even go to church anywhere.

The same thing happens with personal evangelism (Matt 28:19, Mark 16:15, Acts 8:1,4, etc.). For example the Watchtower church doesn't consider a member faithful unless he or she works diligently at reaching the lost. What's the result? – every JW I have ever known works many hours per month seeking converts to their faith. But other churches treat personal evangelism like extra credit. As a result only a very few of their members work hard at reaching the lost.

Less than a century ago every preacher in most any church that was willing to defend publicly what he preached publicly (like Jesus and Paul, Matt 22:15-46, Acts 19:8-10) was considered to have great courage (I Cor 16:13). But that expectation has subsided. Now it is just the opposite – such “contending for the faith” (Jude 3) is frowned upon. Now the membership of those same churches expect their preachers to shun public debate. And so the preachers generally conform to what is expected of them.

This all reminds me of what the Presbyterian Church USA said in 1991 about homosexuality: The church should “re-evaluate its definition of sin to reflect the changing mores of society.” Except we're talking more about “re-evaluating the definition of sin to reflect the expectation of one's church.” In either case, sin is decided by comparison to others instead of by God's word.

ADDENDUM

The Law of Tithe – Is It for Christians?

By Emmanuel Oluwatoba | Niger, Nigeria

The Old Testament law which made paying of tithe compulsory is no longer in effect and thus tithe is no longer binding on Christians today, just like every other ordinance of the law. Christ fulfilled the law and nailed it to the cross (Gal. 4:4-5, Col. 2:14).

In Malachi 3:8-10, God warned the Israelites about their failure to pay tithe and stated that they were robbing Him by doing so. They were told to bring all the tithes into the storehouse so that they might receive blessings from God. This passage is commonly used by some to emphasize the need to pay tithe, and as a matter of fact, tithing is a common practice amongst Christian denominations. But as the scriptures instruct, we are to **test all things** and hold unto that which is good (1Thess. 5:21). It is in this Spirit that we look beyond common practices and ask the question, “*Does God require payment of tithes from Christians today?*” We will search the scriptures for answer to this question.

What Does Tithe Mean?

Tithe means the tenth part of the increase of one's means. This tenth was consecrated and set apart for special purposes. By definition any measure above or below a tenth invalidates it from being a tithe.

Who Gave Tithes?

In the bible the following people gave tithe;

1. Abraham: On his return from rescuing his nephew Lot, Abraham gave a tithe of his spoils to Melchizedek (Gen. 14:20). This was not a requirement from God but he did this voluntarily. He was the first recorded in the Bible to have given tithe.

2. Jacob: Jacob vowed to give a tenth to God (Gen 28:20-22), this was also voluntary.

3 The Israelites: God made a covenant with the Israelites on Mount Sinai (Deut. 5:1-5), and He

demanded a tithe of the produce of the land. In Leviticus 27:30, we read “*All the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the trees, is the LORD's. it is holy to the LORD.*” This tithe was given to the Levites as an inheritance (Num. 18:21).

Under the Law of Moses, the following tithes were given:

a. Numbers 18:20-24: This tithe was the first tithe and was received by the Levites.

b. Numbers 18:25-28: This tithe is the tithe of tithes (Neh. 10:38), and it was taken out of the tithe given to the Levites and taken to the temple.

c. Deuteronomy 14:22-27: This tithe is the festival tithe and was to be eaten by the giver and his households with the Levites within his gates.

d. Deuteronomy 14:28-29: This is the poor tithe, which was given at the end of three years, and is meant to be eaten by the Levites, the fatherless, widows and foreigners.

The children of Israel were to offer their tithes in a place which God shall choose to place his name (Deut.14:23), with the exception of the poor tithe which is meant to be eaten within the gates of the giver. God also permitted those who were far away to sell the goods meant for the festival tithe, take the money to Jerusalem and buy whatever their souls desired with the money (Deut. 14:22-27).

What Does the New Testament Say About Tithe?

The law of tithe was an Old Testament ordinance, and according to Hebrews 7:11-18, the priesthood has



changed and thus the law has been changed. Apostle Paul in Galatians 3:23-25, says that the law was a tutor to bring us to Christ and that since Christ has come, we are no longer under this tutor. Also, Gal. 3:10 sounds a warning to those who would want to return to the ordinances of the law.

The book of Malachi is not addressed to Christians but to the children of Israel. Throughout the book God reminded them that they were disobeying his commands. He spoke about the priests offering defiled food and sacrificing blemished animals to Him (Mal. 2:6-14), He also rebuked them for divorce and intermarriage with Gentiles (Mal. 2:1-9). Reading the book of Malachi, it is clear that God was addressing those who were under the Law of Moses and He charged them with the sin of disobedience. We are not under the law of Moses, so the curses (and blessings) attached to the payment of tithe isn't applicable to us.

Giving in the New Testament

In the New Testament, no proportion is specified, everyone is to give as purposes in his heart and to give liberally and cheerfully, remembering that *“he who sows sparingly shall also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully shall also reap bountifully”* (2 Cor 9:6-7).

Conclusion

The Old Testament law which made paying of tithe compulsory is no longer in effect and thus tithe is no longer binding on Christians today, just like every other ordinance of the law. Christ fulfilled the law and nailed it to the cross (Gal. 4:4-5, Col. 2:14). He has set us free from the yoke of the law (Acts 15:10; Galatians 5:1). Anyone who attempts to enforce the law of tithe ridicules the death of Christ which set us free from the bondage of the law. Remember, *“For as many as are of*

*the works of the law are under a curse. For it is written, “Cursed is everyone who does not **continue in all things** that are written in the book of the law, to do them.”* (Gal 3:10).

God has given us freedom to decide what we will give to Him and this doesn't mean we should abuse the freedom given to us, rather we are to give even more exceedingly for in so doing we will continue to receive blessings from God (Luke 6:38, Acts 20:38, 2 Cor 9:6-8).

FLATTERY

II Samuel 15:6b reads, "so Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel." Did you ever notice how Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel? Read verses 2-6 and you will see Absalom did it with a form of what we call "flattery."

"Flattery" is an insincere compliment made with motives of self interest. Encouraging compliments are a good thing – as long as they are sincere. But insincere compliments given for self serving reasons are sinful. Proverbs 26:28b remarks "a flattering mouth worketh ruin." Proverbs 28:23 says "He that rebuketh a man afterwards shall find more favour than he that flattereth with the tongue." Proverbs 29:5 reads "A man that flattereth his neighbours spreadeth a net for his feet."

The evils of flattery can work two ways. Do we flatter people to get our way, maybe to get them on our side against someone else? Or is our ego such that someone can convince us of just about anything, just as long as they precede their plea with "Thou art righteous" (Proverbs 24:24)? We need to learn that any sin of the tongue "defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of h-e-l-l" (James 3:6).

–Patrick Donahue

ADDENDUM

Forgetting the Past

By Jefferson David Tant | Tennessee, USA

In all matters in life, we have to make a choice between the things of the world, or the things of heaven. One must take preeminence.

“Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 3:13-14).

“Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.” (II Corinthians 5:17).

The apostle Paul reminds his readers of something that we all need to keep in mind, and that is when we are baptized into Christ, we become a new person. We change our thoughts, our habits, our action, our very lives.

We are aware that children who are raised by godly parents and who are baptized at a young age may not have to make any big changes in their lives, but many do not learn about Christ or decide to obey him until they are adults. They may have many behaviors that need to be changed as they look to the future. I am afraid that I have known too many who try to blend their former sinful lives in with their new lives in Christ. Paul gives the admonition that we need to put away any questionable practices and focus forward to a new life in Christ.

In my work in Jamaica, I have learned many “lively choruses” that they love to sing. The words of one are “Things I used to do, I will do them no more. I will keep them no more. Things I used to say I will say them no more,” etc. Consider some things of which we need to be mindful.

Our Speech – *“Let no unwholesome word proceed from*

your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear.” (Ephesians 4:29).

“Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned, as it were, with salt, so that you may know how you should respond to each person.” (Colossians 4:6).

It used to be that crude words were not permitted in movies, on the radio or on the TV. Those days are long gone. People were shocked that the 1939 movie “Gone With the Wind” had the star Clark Gable uttering the word “damn.”

Our Conduct – *“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden...Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 5:14, 16).*

When we are around our neighbors, co-workers, schoolmates and friends, is it obvious to them that we are different? A light that is turned on is obvious to anyone who has eyes to see. In the same way, the conduct of a Christian should be so obvious to others that they know there is something different about that person.

Our Companions – *“Do not be deceived: ‘Bad company corrupts good morals.’” (I Corinthians 15:33).*

“Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? Clean out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been

sacrificed.' (I Corinthians 5:6-7).

Obviously, this does not mean that we cannot associate with people of the world, else how would we ever have an influence on them to lead them to Christ? But who are our closest companions, our dearest friends? Who do we spend most of our spare time with?

This is especially important concerning our children, who are at a stage in life when they are developing their habits and character. Parents need to be watchful as to whom their children's close friends are. But they don't need to be so careful that they don't want their children to spend much time even with other young Christians. Some parents shelter their children so much that they don't really have *any* close friends, not even other young Christians.

Our Goals -- *"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."* (Matthew 6:19-21).

"But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you." (Matthew 6:33).

What is your goal in life? To achieve fame, wealth, accomplishments, education? Obviously, there are some worthwhile goals, but there is one primary goal that far surpasses all the others, and that goal is heaven. We remember the story of the rich man in **Luke 12:19-21** who really worked hard to increase his material wealth, but things didn't turn out very well for him.

"And I will say to my soul,"Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink

and be merry.""But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?' "So is the man who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

Yes, we need to work to provide for our food and clothing, etc., but that must be kept in second place with respect to our life's goals and achievements.

In all matters in life, we have to make a choice between the things of this world, or the things of heaven. One must take the preeminence. We cannot blend them as equals any more than the man who tried to blend the horse and the automobile. It didn't work very well.



I was reminded of Paul's admonition when I came across the picture above. This shows the 1899 "Horseless." This was when transitions were being made from horse-drawn carriages to automobiles. Some manufacturer thought it would help riders feel better about the change, so he built a motor-driven vehicle with the large fake horse head at the front. The hollowed horse's head was used to store gasoline (a bit dangerous). His attempt to blend the old with the new didn't go over very well, as you might imagine.