



SPECIAL REPORT

TREASON IN THE CHURCHES

HOW DO WE LIVE IN ITS MIDST?

THERE ARE ENEMIES of Christ within our midst, within the churches—even within Evangelical Christianity. There are those who are undermining the faith of the sheep through feigned words of fellowship, misusing the authority granted them within their congregations. Often they spew forth their religious bile through the Christian and secular media, posturing as oracles of God by virtue of theological degrees.

Other than in Christianity we see no such attempts from within any religious or philosophical discipline to undermine that discipline. I don't know of any religion or philosophy other than Christianity, in which people who claim to be authorities do everything they can to discredit it.

These people are in Christian colleges and universities; they're in the churches; they're in the Christian and secular media, discrediting the Bible as the infallible Word of God—the Bible that they are supposed to represent.

Is there any other religion wherein the leaders are actively working to discredit what they represent?

Within some religions there may be different sects that fight one another. For example, many Shiite Muslims oppose Sunni Muslims, but neither side has those who say that Muhammad was not God's final and greatest prophet. Neither side would say that Allah is not as great as the Koran says he is; neither side would say that the Koran is not their god's holy book, and/or that it should not be taken at face value for what it says. No Muslim would say, "Yes, the Koran says that, but, well, we can't take it as literal truth; it doesn't really mean what it says." They wouldn't even say, "Well, it was written for people in the sixth and seventh century; we have to look at it with modern understanding."

You don't hear Buddhists saying, "Buddha was a good man, but his teachings are out of date; we need to rethink what he said," or, "That's not what he meant," or, "He didn't really mean to say that," or, "We don't know if he really said that, or not."

You don't hear Hindus saying, "Oh, we don't really know if Brahma or Kali exist."

You won't hear any such thing in any religion other than in Christianity. Only in Christianity do people who claim to be its adherents actively work to destroy its foundation.

This demonstrates a spiritual dimension to the Word of God that causes men to work diligently in attempts to destroy it. There is such a powerful repugnance felt by the ungodly that they must go out of their way—even to the point of adopting life-long careers within Christianity—to do all they can to discredit God's Word.

These are not merely rank-and-file members of scattered congregations; these are highly educated, titled professors and pastors, many with Doctor of Theology degrees from prestigious Christian universities. They publish their faithless works in Christian magazines and journals; they take honorariums for speaking to students

of theology; they work tirelessly to discredit and demean the person of Jesus Christ and His ministry, and the Scriptures that reveal Him. They purposely ridicule those who attempt to stand for the truth of God's Word; they work hard to promote ungodliness, homosexuality, abortion, even paganism, within the churches. They oppose anything that has to do with Jesus Christ as "the Way, the Truth, and the Life."

Many themselves are teachers and professors at Christian universities and Bible schools, using their influence to undermine the faith of young, zealous students wishing to become pastors and leaders within their churches.



We don't see such anger, antagonism—even hatred—against one's professed faith in other religions; only in Christianity are such treasonous attitudes found.

Such evil is evidence that biblical faith possesses a unique spiritual quality that invites the enemies of God—even within Christian institutions—to attack it. No other religion or philosophy has that unique spiritual quality.

And why should they? They are already in Satan's camp.

Jesus said, "A house divided against itself cannot stand."

On the surface it may seem as if Satan's house is divided because the world's religions have a history of conflict with each other. But that conflict is the result of men's pride and hatred for things that are different. Satan uses disunity among different religions to create conditions that will ultimately bring about unity. The average adherent to any particular religion would not be violently opposed to other religions were he not agitated by his religion's leaders.

Most people of all religions want peace. The more violence disunity creates, the more people are willing to accept any form of unity, even if disagreements of form remain. As long as they believe that all spiritual paths lead to the same god, they can live and act in religious harmony. This was partially demonstrated through the World Day of Prayer convened by the late Pope John Paul II at Assisi in 1986. While affirming his belief that true peace resides in Jesus Christ, and that the Roman Catholic Church is the first witness of faith in Jesus, the pope also affirmed belief that all religions possess a common destiny; all worship the same god in their own way. But if that's true, why then did Jesus have to die?

The pope's appeal was for spiritual unity in the cause of world peace. And world peace is the common appeal for all of Satan's deceptions.

Eventually, Satan's man will appear to unite all religions in the cause of world peace. Christianity will follow whole hog after the bait. But first, those who hold to the purity of biblical faith must be either converted away from the truth or destroyed. This is what persecution against those who hold to biblical faith has been about since Abraham walked the earth. It is what caused the Jews to persecute the early Jewish believers in Christ; it is what caused Roman Catholicism to persecute Christians who did not accept the pope as their spiritual head; it is what caused Calvin to persecute those in Geneva, Switzerland, who did not accept his theology; it is what caused the Church of England, the Mormons, and other outwardly professing Christian religions to persecute even to death those within their spheres of influence who did not accept their particular doctrines.

Why is there such hatred of something so beautiful and hope-inspiring as God's Holy Word? Why is there such hatred of the Word of God incarnate that He must be brought down to the level of sinful man? Why is there such hatred of God's people that they must be herded like sheep to the slaughter by wolves who appear as one of them?

In spite of Satan's attacks against the Bible, for true believers in Jesus Christ, the manner in which only faith in Him is attacked from within gives great credibility to the Word of God and to

Jesus Christ as the only Way to God. In addition to our reasoned faith in God's Word based upon the signature of God through fulfilled prophecy and the witness of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, such an irrational evil further proves the truth of God's Word.

Mention the name of Jesus, and all sorts of things happen, not all for good. No other name causes people to cringe; no other name is used as an expletive when cursing one's situation; no other name causes people to become so agitated that they stop their ears, gnash their teeth, and run in a rage to silence the one who speaks it in truth.

Not all enemies of the true Gospel are conscientious about it. Most spiritual error comes through well-meaning but ignorant or naïve people who want to serve God in some way or another. This is true of many of today's pastors who are products of their particular Christian institution.

Wandering into just any old church these days could be a precursor to spiritual death. There are so many varieties of "Christianity" that one must ask, wherein does truth reside? Can they all be true? Are there any without error? A good number of denominations claim to be the only true church, and they insist that in order to be saved one must adhere to their particular doctrines and practices. Some claim to be able to trace their history back to the apostles. This does not refer to Roman Catholicism alone. Some Baptists claim that they are the only true descendants of the Anabaptists—early Christians who resisted the Roman papacy's persecution in order to live a life grounded in pure biblical faith. The Seventh-day Adventists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, all these claim to be the restoration of the faith lost during the past nearly two millennia due to the Roman Catholic Church's dominance over Christendom.

It's as if the virtues of first-century believers are somehow transmitted through the ages via spiritual osmosis. But it wouldn't really matter if these institutions could trace their history to the apostles. According to 1 John 4:3, the apostasy was already at work even then.

We don't mean to classify those institutions that hold to a biblical Christology as equivalent with those that don't, but religious institutions by their nature are divisive and exclusive despite present attempts at ecumenism. Even Evangelicalism has often presented itself as the exclusive way to God, dismissing from eternal life those who may not hold to all of Evangelicalism's tenets.

All except the most cultic groups would (perhaps grudgingly) admit that there are true believers in Jesus in other gatherings outside their own. But there remains in the minds of many, a certain amount of pride for thinking that they belong to the more correct—even only correct—religious community. Even many who have left institutionalism to seek a more biblical way of gathering, such as those meeting in house assemblies, have developed a "better-than-thou" attitude toward brethren in church institutions. They look down on those who have not embraced what they believe is the first-century model for the gathering of the saints. They believe they practice the most viable way of not only entering into the fullness of ministry, but of attaining the best means of edification in the Spirit.

This may be true in comparison to institutionalism, but form does not make right, or holy. The gathering of the saints in love and care for one another is far more important than perfect form.

It feels good to judge others who do not think and/or act as we do. Surely they are deficient in their relationship to God; surely they cannot be (or at the least, probably are not) saved.

Now, Jesus did say, "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way that leads to eternal life, and there are few who find it." But the question is, just how narrow is that way? In fact, where is that way, or what is that way?

One cult went so far as to call itself "The Way," implying that anyone outside its confines was not in "the Way." That particular cult's teachings and practices were so far removed from the true Way that it might better be called "Out of the Way."

But our concern is not so much for people or institutions that are obviously outside the purview of God's Way, as it is for those many who identify themselves as Christians and strive to serve the God of the Bible from a position of love and loyalty regardless of the institution (or non-institutional group) to which they adhere.

We must acknowledge the truth that the way to eternal life is narrow. Yet we also must acknowledge how broad God's mercy and love is for mankind. He is not willing that any would perish, but that all would come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9).

We may judge men's actions; we may judge men's words; we may even judge men's spiritual condition at a given time. But only God knows the end from the beginning. Else why do we pray for those we perceive as lost?

When Jesus came to Israel He looked upon the people with sorrow because He saw them as sheep without a shepherd. They had become far removed from the purity of the faith and were wandering in darkness. But the important thing is that He still saw them as sheep. He understood that it was the religious leaders who had been misdirecting their faith. While He had compassion on the lost sheep of the house of Israel, He had only harsh judgment for their leaders.

A number of the people had faith, but the controversies that arose when Jesus came were evidence that Israel for the most part did not recognize its Messiah. That was simply because their religious leaders had taught them wrongly about the person, nature, and ministry of the Messiah. They had come to expect a conquering hero who would lead a rebellion against the nations of the world (in His day, Rome) and restore the Kingdom of Israel in their midst.

The religious leaders were fully expecting to be placed in positions of great honor and authority within a New World Order of Israelite dominance.

When Jesus began to unbraide them for their evil acts, for their mistreatment of the people, and for their false teachings, they were unprepared to accept Him. Their pride kept the vast majority of them from receiving Him. The few religious leaders who did receive Him, or at least reserved judgment for a time, attempted to find out where lay the truth.

Time and again Jesus rejected the false piety of the Jewish leaders and accepted the humble adoration of those people who hungered for truth and righteousness. Many Gentiles came to

Him, knowing nothing more than that He had words to live by and the power of God to demonstrate His authority over devils and every evil that plagued man.

Did they have a proper Christology by today's Evangelical standards? Did they hold to proper theological exegeses of the Scriptures? Did they even know what the Scriptures said, apart from the few who studied in the synagogues on the Sabbath—and then only under the tutelage of the rabbis who had substituted their oral traditions for the written Word of God?

This is not a dismissal of proper Bible study and striving after as much truth as we can attain. It is merely to say that when Jesus said "Narrow is the way," He was saying that there is only one Way to the Father. That one Way to the Father is through Him; Jesus is the narrow Way.

Some come to Jesus with a less perfect understanding than do others. When we first came to Christ for salvation did we understand as well or as much as we do today? Of course not. Yet He took us at our word, demonstrating that we are saved by grace and not by works. Our works of righteousness were expected to come later in order to prove our faith.

Yet even our works of righteousness were faulty many times. Just as our faith and understanding must grow, so, too, must our works be purified through the leading of the Holy Spirit. Good works done in the flesh may be excused when we are babes in Christ, but we are expected to mature and walk in a manner that will increase our conformity to the image of Christ.

At what stage of faith or understanding is that person who goes to a faulty institution? No one knows. Particularly if that person is not vociferously denouncing the truths of Scripture.

Yes, perhaps the religious leaders in that person's institution convolute the Word of God. But how well does that person know the Word of God in order to exercise discernment? Might he be like the Israelites to whom Jesus came the first time—sheep separated from the true Shepherd, but sheep nonetheless? God's mercy extends beyond what man is often willing to allow.

Just as no other name than Jesus causes consternation among the enemies of the Gospel, no other name has given hope to the hopeless; no other name has brought healing to the sick; no other name has changed the heart of the wicked on such a grand scale.

Doesn't this tell us something? Should it not tell those who denigrate that holy name just how corrupt they are, and how they should at least search God's Word to see if what it says is true?

And should it not cause our faith to be increased?

It is the knowledge that only God's Word comes under such virulent attack from within the ranks of those who claim to be authorities on it that helps to increase my faith.

Yes, "my hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness." Yet our experiences in life, as we tread the path of that hope and the faith that He has granted us, also work to bolster both our hope and our faith.

Abraham, the father of our faith is an example to us:

By faith, Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out into a place that he would afterwards receive for an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.

By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise, because he looked for a city that has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. (Hebrews 11:8-10)

Abraham didn't know where he was going when he obeyed the command of Yahweh to leave his home in Ur of the Chaldees and follow a path that had no clear direction from the start. Just like Abraham, neither do we know where we are going in this world in which we are pilgrims on our own path to the Promised Land of eternal life with Christ. Just like Abraham, we must go out by faith. We don't know who we're going to meet; we don't know what the Lord has in store for us.

Our prayer every morning should be, "Father, guide me through this day. Help me to do Your will."

By faith we stand on God's promise that as we make our plans in life He will direct our paths (Proverbs 16:9; Psalms 37:23).

Jesus said that unless we are converted and become like little children we cannot enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. What we often don't seem to understand is that we are like little children already; but human pride doesn't allow for us to recognize that truth. That is why we must be converted so that God can reveal this to us. Like little children we are woefully lacking in any strength (I am speaking about spiritual strength). Like little children we must rely upon the strength of our Father, given to us through the Holy Spirit, to accomplish anything for God.

He doesn't want us to be **childish** in the sense of being foolish and witless; He wants us to be **childlike**, trusting Him just as when we were little children we trusted our fathers to take care of us—to guide us. Everything we do must be by His strength, not ours.

Too many Christians determine in their minds, "I am going to serve God." Consequently, they are out there trying hard to serve God. And that's the problem; they are trying hard. Serving God in truth is allowing God to use us. But rather than being used by God for His purposes, many are trying to use God for their own purposes.

Their own purposes may be noble; they may be religious; they may be good. But if they are not performed by faith, through faith in Jesus Christ, they are works of the flesh.

The apostle Paul speaks to works of the flesh, contrasting them to works done in obedience to the Lord:

For we are laborers together with God. You are God's farm; you are God's building. According to the grace of God which is given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let every man take heed how he builds on it. For no man can lay another foundation than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

Now if any man builds gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble on this foundation, every man's work shall be revealed, for the day shall declare it because it shall be revealed by fire, and the fire shall test every man's work of what sort it is.

If any man's work abides which he has built there-upon, he shall receive a reward.

If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss, but he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire.

Notice that works of wood, hay and stubble can be built on the true foundation which is Jesus Christ. One may have all good intentions to serve the Lord, and yet miss the mark by attempting to serve Him in the flesh rather than by the leading of the Holy Spirit. This is what Saul did in bringing judgment upon him that cost him his kingdom.

Yahweh had commanded Saul to destroy the Amalekites to the last man, woman and child, but Saul thought to do better:

But Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the calves, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them. But they utterly destroyed everything that was vile and refuse.

Then the Word of YHWH came to Samuel, saying, "It sorrows Me that I have set up Saul to be king, for he has turned back from following Me, and has not performed my commandments."

And it grieved Samuel, and he cried out to YHWH all night.

And when Samuel rose early to meet Saul in the morning, it was told Samuel, saying, "Saul came to Carmel, and, look, he set him up a place, and has gone away and passed on, and gone down to Gilgal."

And Samuel came to Saul, and Saul said to him, "Blessed be you of YHWH! I have performed the commandment of YHWH."

And Samuel said, "What then is the meaning of this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?"

And Saul said, "They have brought them from the Amalekites. For the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice to YHWH your God, and the rest we have utterly destroyed."

Then Samuel said to Saul, "Stay, and I will tell you what YHWH has said to me tonight."

And he said to him, "Say on."

And Samuel said, "When you were small in your own sight, were you not made the head of the tribes of Israel, and YHWH anointed you king over Israel?"

"And YHWH sent you on a journey, and said, 'Go and utterly destroy the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are consumed.'

"Why then did you not obey the voice of YHWH, but flew upon the spoil, and did evil in the sight of YHWH?"

And Saul said to Samuel, "Yes, I have obeyed the voice of YHWH, and have gone the way which YHWH sent me, and have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites."

"But the people took from the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice to YHWH your God in Gilgal."

And Samuel said, “Has YHWH as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of YHWH? Look! To obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams. For rebellion is like the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is like iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of YHWH, He has also rejected you from being king. (1Samuel 15:9-23)

Samuel’s attempt to serve God was from his own flesh, yet he evidently believed he was obeying God. This self-deception is common in men. We naturally tend to believe that religious thoughts that come into our minds are from the Lord when, in truth, they may be of our own imagination.

Then, too, we may carelessly assume that God will receive any work we intend to do for Him, simply because we think our heart is right. But we may in fact be offering strange fire, just as Aaron’s sons Nadab and Abihu did, which resulted in God’s judgment of death upon them (Leviticus 10:1-2).

Thankfully, our gracious Father does not strike us dead, but instead, by his grace and in honor of our faith in His Son, merely withholds rewards for our failures.

It is important, none-the-less, that we strive to be sure that our works are of His Spirit, and not of our flesh.

The work of the flesh is why there are so many Christian institutions that have been taken over by the enemy. Either they were works of the flesh to begin with, or they devolved into works of the flesh because faithless men (or women) took them over.

We don’t fault the intentions of many who began these institutions—the universities, colleges, churches—but one must wonder how much of God is in these things.

We who recognize the deceptions in our midst must be careful also. We must not become so complacent that we think, “Well, we’ve got it together. We’re doing it right, and everyone else has gotten it wrong.”

We may have something to offer, but we should heed God’s Word that warns us, “Pride precedes destruction, and an arrogant spirit precedes a fall” (Proverbs 16:18).

This warning is not for individuals only; it applies to God’s assemblies as well. Humility is essential to our survival, not only in our personal walk with Christ, but in our corporate Body life. It should be our hope—our earnest desire—that God will humble us lest we become prideful in our knowledge, wisdom, discernment, or any area in which He uses us.

His humbling of His servants can be very embarrassing, so it’s best that we not find ourselves in that position. Let us guard our hearts lest we fail.

If we begin to think of ourselves more highly than we ought, we should recognize the humility of God’s greatest servants, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and especially Jesus. Can any of us say we have done works as great as Jesus did?

Yes? You think you’ve done some great works? How wonderful for you. Can your life equal that of the Word of God who became a man and suffered without complaint at the hands of His own creation?

The amazing thing is that, whereas Jesus often told those He healed not to make it known, today’s alleged “healers” spend

inordinate amounts of time bragging about their paltry accomplishments (if, indeed there is really any merit to them) as a means to steal from widows’ purses.

These men and women use the Word of God for their own profit. In the process, they may not do as the detractors against the faith do by bringing doubt about whether or not it is true, but they pervert the Word of God and cause it to say what it doesn’t say. The Scriptures speak of them:

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in Heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, and in Your name have cast out devils, and in Your name done many wonderful works?’

“And then I will say to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who work wickedness. (Matthew 7:21-23)

In spite of the opposition to truth that false teachers convey there is still hope for them. Our Father is gracious to forgive every sin except that of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Scripture is replete with accounts of how He forgave even His enemies—those who fought against His purposes.

The apostle Paul is an example of one who even persecuted the saints for a time, but whose heart was changed by God. He became the oracle of God to the assemblies through his letters that Peter counted among the Scriptures (2 Peter 3:15-16).

Yes, Paul acted in ignorance and out of a passion for God’s Word as he understood it at the time, but there are others who, in spite of utter wickedness, were granted God’s grace when they turned from their wickedness if only for a season.

What person in Scripture displayed more wickedness than King Ahab (with the exception of his wife Jezebel)? After Ahab had stolen his neighbor Naboth’s land at the prompting of Jezebel, the prophet Elijah came to Ahab and pronounced God’s judgment upon him, Jezebel, and Ahab’s posterity. First Kings 21:25-29 tells us of Ahab’s repentance:

But there was no one like Ahab, who sold himself to work wickedness in the sight of YHWH, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up. And he did very abominably in following idols, according to all things that the Amorites did, whom YHWH cast out before the children of Israel.

And it happened that when Ahab heard those words [from Elijah], that he tore his clothes, and put sackcloth on his body, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and became gentle.

And the word of YHWH came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, “Do you see how Ahab humbles himself before Me? Because he humbles himself before Me I will not bring the evil in his days, but I will bring the evil upon his house in his son’s days.”

Does this mean Ahab became saved eternally? Not necessarily. But it reveals God’s mercy and graciousness toward a repentant heart, even if that heart again turns away from Him. God deals with people according to their faith at a given time. Yet He is not slack regarding the condition of their hearts at

those given times. He knows when our actions are from a sincere heart or from a feigned piety. But ultimately it is God, not man, who judges.

Yet another example is King Saul, who, though chosen by God to be king over Israel, many believe was damned for his disobedience to God's commands. After having Samuel called up from Paradise in Hades by the witch of Endor, Saul was told of God's judgment upon him:

"Because you did not obey the voice of YHWH, nor execute his fierce wrath upon Amalek, therefore YHWH has done this thing to you this day.

"Moreover, YHWH will also deliver Israel with you into the hand of the Philistines, and tomorrow you and your sons will be with me. YHWH will also deliver the army of Israel into the hand of the Philistines." (1 Samuel 28:18-19)

Was Saul damned? Did he lose his salvation?

Samuel told Saul that he would be with him the next day. Where was Samuel? In Paradise, the compartment of the righteous in Hades, referred to in Luke 16:22 as Abraham's Bosom.

Saul was not in the same class of wickedness as was Ahab who came later. He was weak in character, true. He lived in fear. He knew he had lost God's favor because of his failures as a king, so he feared losing his kingdom. He acted out of fear rather than out of faith. God even sent an evil spirit to vex him. But he still believed in YHWH as the only true God. He had faith, but he failed to live by his faith.

We don't really know the end from the beginning for Saul, or for anyone else, so we hold out hope for those we love but who are not acting in faith.

A recently modern example of one who exhibited both a love for the Lord Jesus and a weakness for the world was Elvis Presley. He was an icon of sexuality, not so much of his own doing as that of his manager, Colonel Tom Parker. Presley was known as a shy country boy off stage, but on stage his show-business persona took over. Women pressed upon him, making it all the more difficult for him to maintain a pure life. His conflicted life led him into drugs and dissipation. Yet he often incorporated Christian hymns into his performances. Back stage he would sing Christian songs for hours with different Christian singing groups that he might use as backup singers. He seemed torn—struggling for a relationship with the Lord while unable to resist the lure of the world.

At one performance a group of girls in the audience stood and unfurled a banner that said, "Elvis, You're The King."

He stopped his performance and said, "No, Jesus is the King."

Embarrassed, the girls sat down. Presley had risked alienating his adoring fans by publicly affirming faith in Jesus and proclaiming a truth that the world rejects.

Men may judge Elvis Presley by his public performances, just as many entertainers are judged either good or evil based on their public personas.

In many ways, Presley may have been like Saul. Or Sampson. Or Solomon. All believed in and loved YHWH, but all were weak in the flesh.

I don't know Elvis Presley's ultimate fate; only God knows that; perhaps Presley died at the opportune moment according to God's grace. But what I do know is that God's judgment is tempered by mercy, and that Jesus Christ is the ultimate example of His mercy. Romans 5:8 says:

God exhibits His love toward us in that, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Yes, we know all the Scriptures that warn us of living in sin. But we don't know the condition of one's heart, particularly where it might be upon one's death. If one turns in repentance and sorrow for sin, and trusts his eternal destiny to Jesus Christ, God's mercy will be granted him even upon his dying breath.

I say this to encourage those of you who are praying for family, friends, and even acquaintances who are living in sin—who may even be rejecters of Christ, even anti-Christ, at this moment. Do not stop praying; do not give in to the idea that anyone is beyond God's grace.

There are different classifications of people: people who have faith, but are weak; people who are not enemies of God, but have no faith; people who have no knowledge of God; people who are conscientious enemies of God.

There is a difference between one who believes in Jesus, but is weak in following Him, and one who is a conscious enemy of God. The former may have no fruit in their lives; the latter purposely work against God to destroy the faith of others.

For those of us who know the Word of God and who have been touched by His Holy Spirit to live for Him (however imperfectly we do so), our responsibility is to focus not on the beginning of our salvation experience, but on learning obedience to Him. We are not to be our own man (or woman); we are not to seek to do things on our own for Him, but to merely learn to take what the Lord places before us and to live under His authority.

Many spend their entire lives trying to figure out what God wants of them, and the concept of living under His authority never enters their minds. Instead they are given over to doing whatever their pastor tells them to do. They get involved in busyness for the Lord, never sure of whether or not what they are doing is His will for their lives.

This is not to denigrate Christian service, but to hopefully inspire all of us—myself included—to offer ourselves daily as a sacrifice to God, which is our logical service to Him (Romans 12:1).

Let us not focus so much on, "Well, I'm saved; that's all I need." Let us rather understand that there is a coming Kingdom on this earth in which those who have overcome the world, the flesh, and the Devil, will enjoy an inheritance, and will reign with Jesus Christ for one thousand years. If we wish to be a part of that Kingdom, now is the time to surrender ourselves to His service. There is a special blessing to come in the first resurrection.

There is coming with the first resurrection a one-thousand year interim during which the Kingdom of Heaven, with Jesus present on the earth, will manifest itself through righteous rule among the nations. That blessing is for those who are in this life making preparation to reign with Him.

This should be an incentive for us to live the life the Lord wants us to live. Yet for the most part, what we continually hear in the pulpits and in the Christian media is how Jesus died for our sins, and how to live a practical Christian life, standing for truth and justice in a fallen world.

That's all true, and it is good milk for babes. But it fails to address an important element for our life in Christ: obedience to the will of God according to the leading of the Holy Spirit on a daily, moment-by-moment basis.

This doesn't mean we strive to achieve some great accomplishment; it means that we serve our Lord according to His will, and not according to what we think is our "calling." We must not fall into the trap of doing good for goodness's sake, which ends in pharisaical pride, ultimately destroying true spirituality.

So the question is, how do we take our doctrine and convert it into real-life practice so that it is not merely a "fact," but a reality in our lives?

Now, the Lord isn't normally going to speak audibly to us and say, "I want you to go to the store and buy a tube of toothpaste" (although we may have a distinct impression from Him to act in some mundane way as He leads us where He wants us to be for His service). He does speak to us vividly at times, and our hearts must be attentive in case He does do that. But more often, He speaks to us through circumstances, His written Word, the ministry of others, even through attacks from our enemies.

Communion with the Father comes through the Holy Spirit. And the more we have that expectation to be in communion with Him, the more the Holy Spirit deals with us so that we might have an increasing communion with Him.

There are many who have a desire for sound doctrine, and they work diligently to proclaim it, yet it never enters into their practical life. They live as if all that is needed is to "believe." James says belief is good, but that the devils also believe the truth, yet they tremble in fear of the judgment to come (James 2:19).

It's easy to become occupied with religious subjects and miss the mark of faith. The Sadducees in Jesus' day were very occupied religiously, but they didn't believe in anything supernatural. They didn't really believe in a personal relationship with God. To them God existed in a plane that had no interaction with the created cosmos. They were probably akin to the deists of today.

The Sadducees had no real problem with their hypocrisy because God wasn't real to them. They occupied their time with God; they earned their living through Him. But He wasn't real to them, so they had no fear of God.

May this not be said of the treasonous pastors, theologians, teachers and professors in Christian institutions?

This is the difference between true sons of God and self-made servants of self-made gods.

When the Sadducees came to Jesus to test Him by stating a purely hypothetical question about whose wife a woman would be in the resurrection, after she had been the wife of seven brothers in succession upon each one's death, Jesus contrasted the sons of this world with the sons of God. He called the sons of God, sons of the resurrection (Luke 20:27-38). Our sonship will not be fully realized until we are resurrected at His return.

We often speak of ourselves as "sons of God," and that is true. Yet at this stage we are merely children on our way to full stature as sons of God who will attain the inheritance. The full stature as sons of God will come with the resurrection, after which we will inherit the Kingdom of Heaven during the millennial reign of our elder brother, Jesus.

A baby boy is a son, but he is not qualified to attain to his father's household until he has matured through the growth process. An obedient son will inherit a righteous father's estate; a disobedient son will be disinherited by a righteous father.

So we can be like the Sadducees and have a lot of doctrinal knowledge, and argue over how many angels can fit on the head of a pin, and formulate doctrine, but that will not produce holy living in us. It will not produce fellowship with God. And only in fellowship with God can we put to death the deeds of the flesh.

For you have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, "Abba, Father."

The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God. And if children, then heirs—heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ, if so be that we suffer with Him—that we may also be glorified together. For I declare that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation waits for the revealing of the sons of God. (Romans 8:15-19)

The fullness of our adoption will not be realized until our bodies are resurrected. We are saved in hope (expectation). That's the beginning. We are born again by the Spirit of God and we receive an expectation—a surety within our hearts of the future resurrection to glory with Christ Jesus.

But now we must work out our salvation which, according to Paul in his letter to the Philippians (12:2), must be with fear and trembling. But why with fear and trembling? Is our salvation not sure? Yes it is, as long as we continue to abide in Christ:

And now, little children, abide in Him so that when He appears we may have confidence and not be ashamed in front of Him at His coming. (1 John 2:28)

John is speaking to believers, suggesting that we could be ashamed when we meet Him face-to-face.

There is an expectation for our lives that goes beyond living according to our own will, or even doing good works. Everything must be done according to our abiding in Christ. Living religiously is not what counts us worthy. No religious institution can save us, or even result in our walking in the Spirit.

Now, we are not going to reach perfection in this life, but we must practice our faith; we must abide in Christ (walk in His will).

How do we do this? By consciously giving our will over to Him through prayer. Every day we should thank Him for the life He has given us, and we should ask Him to guide us through the day, giving us His strength to perform His will. If we sin, we must confess it and move on. Do not become distracted from His work because you feel like a hypocrite. By outward appearances we are all hypocrites; we all fail constantly. Let that work humility in us, but let it not discourage us from continuing to serve Him. ❖

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