

Expository Files



Jon W. Quinn, Warren E. Berkley - Editors

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The Front Page

Jesus, a Whale, and Religious Freedom in Vietnam **By Jon W. Quinn**

This past year I have read reports of sad events in Viet Nam. These events have to do with the persecution of simple New Testament Christianity. The persecution has involved imprisonment and other abuse for the "crime" of worshiping and teaching in accordance with the New Testament of Jesus Christ. These reports are true, and specifics could be given, but due to the ongoing threat if you are not already familiar with them you'll just have to take my word for it. I do not wish to expose any of my brethren to greater threat.

How that contrasts with another story, also about religion, and also about Vietnam, from the Associated Press. It seems that a dead whale washed ashore on April 2nd of this year (2004) and hundreds of Vietnamese came from far and near to worship it. This occurred about 100 miles south of Ho Chi Minh City. There are plans to erect a temple nearby because the whale started decomposing quickly. This way, the bones can continue to be worshiped for many happy years to come. It seems that many villagers in the region worship whales and consider a dead whale washed ashore a sign of good luck for those who make their living from fishing.

Well, at least some worshippers can freely worship in Vietnam.

²¹ For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

²² Professing to be wise, they became fools,

²³ and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.

²⁴ Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them.

*²⁵ For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.
(Romans 1:21-25)*

The People Who Walk In Darkness Shall See A Great Light

(Isaiah 9:1-7)

By Jon W. Quinn

It was during times of apostasy and sin that God sent prophets to Israel and Judah. The work of a prophet was to proclaim God's word as the Lord gave it to him through His Holy Spirit (II Peter 1:20,21). This would include the foretelling of future events, though it was not limited to that. Prophets also reminded the people of past events and gave instruction about what they ought to do at the present.

One of the most well known of these prophets was Isaiah. He has come to be known by some as "The Messianic Prophet" because so much of his message had to do with the coming Messiah and His kingdom. In one such section, Isaiah tells of a time to come when a great light will come and shine throughout the land now draped in darkness. This prophecy was fulfilled about seven centuries later by Jesus, of Nazareth, our Messiah and Redeemer. Let us consider Isaiah's text and how it is fulfilled in Jesus. (Isaiah 9:1-7).

From Gloom to Glory

"But there will be no more gloom for her who was in anguish; in earlier times He treated the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali with contempt, but later on He shall make it glorious, by the way of the sea, on the other side of Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. The people who walk in darkness will see a great light; those who live in a dark land, the light will shine on them. Thou shalt multiply the nation, Thou shalt increase their gladness; They will be glad in Thy presence as with the gladness of harvest, as men rejoice when they divide the spoil. For Thou shalt break the yoke of their shoulders and the staff of their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, as in the battle of Midian. For every boot of the booted warrior in the battle tumult, and the cloak rolled in blood, will be for burning, as fuel for the fire." (Isaiah 9:1-5).

One of the most serious thrusts of Isaiah's prophecy is the disloyalty of Judah and Israel to God and His withdrawal of His divine favor from them. But following this judgment, which will bring gloom and anguish to the land, there will be glory. Isaiah even pinpoints the region where the Light will dawn. It would not be in Jerusalem, where one might expect, but rather far to the north, in a region called Galilee. Seven centuries later, this very passage is referred to by the apostle Matthew who tells of Jesus beginning His preaching in Galilee, from Capernaum by the sea (Matthew 4:12-17).

The idea of Jesus as the Light shining forth in the darkness is also a most appropriate description of the Savior and His gospel. The apostle John tells us that the Light is Jesus; that He is the True Light which comes into the world (John 1:9-13) but that many loved the darkness rather than the light (John 3:19-21) and thus reject God's light, the new spiritual birth into God's family, and eternal life. Instead, loving the evil of darkness, they secure only judgment for themselves; eternal ruin. How much better our lives in this world would be if all came to the light and swept away the darkness!

At the time of the coming of the light, the LORD promised to bless the nation again. He would multiply their blessings and make them glad, as in the time of a bountiful harvest. This most certainly has reference to God's spiritual nation of Israel, His church; and the spiritual riches we have in Christ; and our joy in Him. Our harvest is the "fruit of the Spirit" which is "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Galatians 5:22,23).

The enemy has always been sin. This cruel oppressor will be defeated as well. Jesus, indeed, lifted the burden of sin from the souls of His people. Sin is no longer our master and instead of the wages of sin, we look forward to the free gift of God; eternal life (Romans 6:1-4; 12-18; 20-23).

A Description of the Messiah

"For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace." (Isaiah 9:6).

The Messiah came to us first as a child; an infant born in Bethlehem. He grew into manhood and fulfilled this and all prophecies made concerning Him. Notice the various aspects of His reign:

First, "the government shall rest on His shoulders". Today, in His spiritual kingdom, Jesus has all authority (Matthew 28:18-20). When we

obey the gospel, we leave "the domain of darkness" and are transferred into "the kingdom of His beloved Son" (Colossians 1:12,13).

Second, Jesus has become our "Wonderful Counselor". In the Hebrew, the idea is that His counsel is a thing of wonder and awe. In Jesus' teachings we have the absolute best advice on how to live our lives to be eternally successful. Though the Law came through Moses, "grace and truth comes through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17).

Third, Our Lord Jesus is also our "Mighty God". The word for "mighty" also means "hero" teaching not only the Deity of Christ but also His action in our behalf to save us from doom. He is the greatest hero of all time, for nothing compares to His sacrifice, his love and His power. And He is "Immanuel" which means "God with us" (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:23; Philippians 2:5-11; II Peter 1:1).

Fourth, Jesus is also referred to as "Eternal Father". Jesus, the eternal Word of God, has indeed become our spiritual Father by giving us "the right to become children of God" (John 1:12,13). Jesus also reveals the Heavenly Father to us (John 1:18) and since the Son of God bears His Father's characteristics we can truly say when we have seen Jesus we have been shown the Father (John 14:8-11).

And Finally, Jesus is the "Prince of Peace". Only He could bring about reconciliation between God and man (II Corinthians 5:18,19). Though faith in Christ brings conflict with the forces of darkness, and sometimes hardships and persecution and betrayal, it also brings harmony with God and a "peace that passes understanding." Even the announcement of the angels at His birth refer to this peace that we may have with God and His goodwill toward us because of the Savior (Luke 2:11-14).

The Messiah's Kingdom

"There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over His kingdom, To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord will accomplish this." (Isaiah 9:7).

Isaiah then turns from the Messiah to the Messiah's kingdom. There will be no end to the kingdom of Christ. Unlike the nations of earth which come and go; and human governments which are constantly replaced, the kingdom of Christ "cannot be shaken" Hebrews 12:26-29). Even at the last day, when by the command of God the heavens and earth are shaken and removed, the kingdom of Christ shall stand, and Jesus Himself will deliver it up to the Father in Heaven (I Corinthians 15:24-28).

Jesus is now on His throne, the throne of David, ruling over His kingdom at the right hand of God (Acts 2:29-33). His throne is forever; and His "righteous scepter" is in His hand (Hebrews 1:8-9). The zeal of the Lord has indeed accomplished this! It is time to live in the Light!

One of the most well known of these prophets was Isaiah. He has come to be known by some as "The Messianic Prophet" because so much of his message had to do with the coming Messiah and His kingdom... Isaiah tells of a time to come when a great light will come and shine throughout the land now draped in darkness. This prophecy was fulfilled about seven centuries later by Jesus, of Nazareth, our Messiah and Redeemer. (Isaiah 9:1-7).

Regret, Remorse, or Repentance?
(2 Corinthians 7:10)
By Carey Dillinger

For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. (NKJV)

I am sure that every teacher of the Gospel commiserates with Old Testament prophets such as Isaiah and Ezekiel. God told Isaiah that even if he did preach the Word as he was instructed to do so, no one would listen. (Isa. 6:8-10.) In the beginning of his ministry Ezekiel had no serious listeners and even after his oracles concerning the fall of Jerusalem came true and his notoriety increased, the listeners were willing to listen, but were still not obedient. (Eze. 33:30-33.)

Why would the people not hear the prophecy of God? Or if they did listen, why would they not heed the warnings of impending judgment? Our text suggests that it is "godly sorrow" that produces repentance which in turn leads to salvation. Isaiah and Ezekiel's listeners obviously did not come to feel this "godly sorrow."

The members of the Corinthian church were in need of repentance as seen in Paul's first letter to them. Our text shows that they took his rebuke and exhortation just the way they should and changed their mind and sought forgiveness.

Wiersbe suggests that a distinction can be made between regret, remorse and repentance. Regret is that activity of the mind (intellect) that causes us to say, "Why did I do that?" Remorse touches us a little deeper causing us to feel disgust and pain (involving both the intellect and the heart), but not causing us to change our ways. True repentance brings in

the third aspect of our minds – our will. To truly repent one must have a change of will. “Godly sorrow” is the catalyst that brings us to true repentance. [Warren Wiersbe, *Be Reverent*, p. 149.]

I am reminded of the chorus of an obscure song from the late nineties that counseled, “If you are going to change, you better start changing your mind.” We must change our minds (intellect-heart-will) about our sins, agree with what God says about them, hate ourselves for what we have done, turn from our sin and turn to God for mercy and forgiveness.

Compare and contrast the cases of Peter’s denial and Judas’ betrayal. Both sinned, but only Peter felt “godly sorrow.” When the rooster crowed he remembered his sin of denial and immediately experienced the kind of sorrow that we are discussing (Mt. 26:75). On the other hand Judas only felt regret and remorse (Mt. 27:3); so, feeling only self-sorrow he went out and hanged himself. Forgiveness (and ultimately our salvation) hinges on whether the sinner is willing to turn from his sins and turn towards God and faith in Christ (Acts 20:21). [Wiersbe, p. 149.]

This attitude of “godly sorrow” is exactly what was expressed by David as he came to realize that he was the man of Nathan’s parable (2 Sam. 12:13). Cain and Esau however are examples of men who suffered the sorrow of this world and the consequences that it brings.

Worldly sorrow could involve such things as loss of property, loss of friends, disappointment, or disgrace. It could be that kind of sorrow that is expressed as “I am just sorry I got caught!” Cain of course was sorry his sacrifice did not please the Lord; in his remorse he killed his brother (Gen 4:3-8). Esau was sorry that his physical appetites caused him to lose his birthright, but he and his ancestors never came back to the Lord (Gen. 25:30ff).

Are we willing to give up our sins with the proper attitude of “godly sorrow?” Or are we more likely to begrudge any changes we have to make?

Regret and remorse did nothing for the spiritual lives of Judas, Cain or Esau; it can do nothing for ours either!

Only “godly sorrow” will lead to true repentance!

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“The Spirit of Truth And The Spirit of Error”

{1 John 4:1-6}

Warren E. Berkley

¹*Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.* ²*By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God,* ³*and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.*

⁴*You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.* ⁵*They are of the world. Therefore they speak as of the world, and the world hears them.*

⁶*We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.*

Throughout the first epistle of John it is clear that the apostle is concerned about Christians being deceived. He wrote with urgency to warn them about *anti-Christ* in chapter two. In that context the writer said, “...no lie is of the truth,” and he said, “who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ?” In chapter three, verse seven he said: “Let no one deceive you.”

John was not an alarmist or paranoid. But he entertained a realistic concern about Christians being deceived; he knew the spirit of error as opposed to the spirit of truth. If that reality escapes our notice, we are in trouble today.

“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”

If you look at this verse on the simplest level – *and that should always be our starting place* – **this is a prohibition: “Do not believe!”** An apostle of Christ is telling us *not to do something*. In the older translations: “believe not every spirit.” In the New King James: “Do not believe.” In a later, recently published translation: “Don’t believe all people who say they have the Spirit.”

Let me illustrate this. If you have ever watched religious television you know it is common for a preacher to tell his audience that he has the

Holy Spirit, or that God personally appeared to him and told him to do or say certain things. Apart from the Scriptures and not subject to any verification you can be satisfied with – the man or woman simply says “they have the Spirit.” Consider what the apostle John says here: “Don’t believe all people who say they have the Spirit.” This is a prohibition from an apostle, and he says, “do not believe.”

Many passages in the New Testament require belief; there is the command to believe. Look back into chapter three here in First John, at verse 23 - “And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ...” In Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, evidence is given upon which to base our faith in Christ. Belief is encouraged; is urged; is commanded. But here, in 1 John 4:1, belief is prohibited: **“Believe not every spirit.”**

We cannot just accept anyone who claims they have the Spirit; we cannot just let our minds fall under the influence of any spirit. It may be the spirit of error. The only way to know is to read the Word of God.

You cannot believe everything you hear! Let me just name several fields of human activity:

Politics ~ *Can you believe everything you hear?*

Medicine?

Science?

History?

Computers?

What about religion? **Can you believe everything you hear?** If you listen to the various religious messages about in the world today, you soon discover messages in conflict. All you hear cannot be the truth. All you hear cannot be taught in the Scriptures by God.

Some theological systems maintain that we are predestined, without regard to the personal will of heart. Others have built a sacramental system, surrounded by traditions and man-made doctrine and practice. At large in “evangelical” religion, there is a primary concentration on belief in Christ, but often denying the role of baptism and downplaying obedience to the teachings of the apostles. Religious cults claim authority in their writings and structure. Human creeds are enforced. Some in world religions deny that Jesus Christ is the Savior, the Only Begotten Son of God. Do we just believe everything we hear? The messages in modern religion are in conflict.

John says: **Do not believe everybody who claims they are telling you what you ought to believe and do in religion!** Do not accept every

teacher's claim that he is telling you what the Holy Spirit revealed. **Try the spirits; test all religious teaching!**

Let me ask you ~ *Which religious teachers today, should we apply this test to??* **Every single one of them!** Billy Graham, Benny Hinn, Jerry Falwell, Max Lucado, Charles Swindoll, Warren Berkley and every other preacher or teacher you might listen to, and every uninspired author you read. Every single religious teacher should be tested in the same way, by simply seeing if what he says is in the Scriptures!

Let me state the matter in these terms:

Never think – that if a man is popular and brings in huge crowds, that means he must be teaching the truth!

Never think – that if a man is a good public speaker and can hold the attention of an audience, that means he must be teaching the truth.

Never think – that if you like the person, he must be teaching the truth.

Never think – that if a man has been baptized and is a member of a local church of Christ, he has to be a perfect teacher of truth.

Never think – that if a man quotes a lot of Scripture, he must be teaching the truth.

Never think – that if a man has academic, educational credentials, he must be teaching the truth!!

There is only one way to determine if a man is teaching the truth - - **see if what he says is in the Bible!!** In order for you to make that determination – you know what you'll have to do? Read and study your Bible!

This will help. Let me take us to another passage, in Acts 17:10-11.

¹⁰*Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews.*

¹¹*These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. ¹²Therefore many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men.*

Observe two things:

ONE, it doesn't say they searched the Scriptures while listening, or when they got home for a few minutes. **They searched the Scriptures daily!**

TWO, the Bereans applied the test of Scripture to an apostle of Christ! And they are commended as being noble in this! If they needed to use the Scriptures to verify the word of an apostle, it is certain we must use the Scriptures today to verify the word of those who are not apostles.

John, why is this necessary? **Because "many false prophets have gone out into the world."** We can complain about and lament the fact that this is so, but in the end, we must face this reality. It shouldn't be – but it is so. Satan is on the job every day, and he is at work through **false teachers; false prophets and false religions.** He is busy in the world, in families, in the church, to gradually displace the truth with error.

I'm aware we are talking about things not generally accepted in our culture; not religiously correct. There is a general attitude in the public that every form of religion is all right, nothing should be called "false." There is a general distaste for calling anyone a false teacher or false prophet, **but the opinions and conventions of the culture should have no influence on us!** John, an apostle of Christ, wants us to face this reality, **there are "many false prophets gone out into the world."**

In verses 2 & 3 – John makes an application of this, in his time and for his readers.

²By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, ³and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.

There were false prophets then and they were denying the human existence of Christ. Jesus came in the flesh; we call that, "the incarnation." Deity became flesh and dwelt among us. That's historical gospel truth.

Some just said, **"No, this isn't true." Their doctrine was – Jesus did not come in the flesh.** Probably, Gnostic in their view of things – opposed to any suggestion of Deity coming in the flesh, so they would not confess that Jesus Christ came in the flesh.

John says three things about them:

ONE, they are “not of God.”

TWO, this is the spirit of the antichrist.

THREE, you have heard this was coming; it is now already in the world.

Verse 4: “You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.”

John is rigid and shows no compromise at all, in separating light from darkness; truth from error; God from the devil . . . and the people who belong to God from the people who live in association with the devil! The false prophets are wrong and in their false teaching, they show their opposition to Christ (they are *anti-Christ*), and they show their association with the devil. But to faithful Christians – John says: “You are of God...” “You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.”

As I accept God’s Word, believe in Christ, live by the activity of faith – God abides in me – and that puts me in position to overcome, to defeat the evil one, “who is in the world.” Using God’s word to test everything is essential to this result.

Verses 5 & 6 . . .

They are of the world. Therefore they speak as of the world, and the world hears them. We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

This whole passage is a distinct contrast between false and true teachers. This is seen in the emphatic use of "they" in verse 5 and "we" in verse 6.

"They" refers to the false teachers who have gone out into the world. They are influenced by the world; associated with the world; so, they keep on speaking out of worldly wisdom, and the world keeps on hearing them. One man said, "The world listens to those who speak its own language."

On the other hand, John and the other apostles were "of God," and they spoke the truth of God; *their message was in tune with God's infinite wisdom – because it came from God.*

So, there is a difference and by testing the spirits; by comparing what is taught to what is revealed, we can know **the difference between truth and error.**

Now, one way to consider this is – ***The message authenticates the speaker, not the speaker the message.*** Let me explain. It is a mistake to decide you like the man, therefore you'll accept everything he says. The better approach is – take the message, compare that message with what is revealed; *then accept the message - not because of the man, but because it is revealed.*

One thing must influence everything we believe, teach and practice.

The Word of God. The Word of God is inspired, authoritative and sufficient to govern all that we do before God (2 Tim. 3:16,17).

You cannot turn your soul's salvation over to men. You cannot just listen to a preacher you like and let that govern your responses to God. Search the Scriptures. Read your Bible. Hear, believe and obey the gospel. Just be a Christian; a member of the Lord's church. "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free," (Jno. 8:32).

Philippians 4:13
David Smitherman

The Text: I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me.

The Meaning Given To It: Many denominational preachers and even some brethren---especially those into the various forms of the "positive thinking" philosophy---have adopted this verse as their motto. Robert Schuller says on an Amway motivational tape, "You don't know what power you have within you...You make the world into anything you choose. Yes, you can make your world into whatever you want it to be." Norman Vincent Peale echoes those sentiments in Positive Imaging, p. 77, "Your unconscious mind...has a power that turns wishes into realities when the wishes are strong enough." And, finally, listen to Oral Roberts: "Whatever you can conceive, and believe, you can do." Miracle Of Seed Faith, p. 7. In other words, this verse is supposed to teach that anything you want to do or become you will achieve if you will just let Christ strengthen you, think positive thoughts, and work real hard. It is sort of a "wish upon a star and all your dreams will come true" verse in which God gives us a signed blank check and we write in the amount with His assurance that He'll cash it.

Let me be clear: (1) There is nothing wrong with thinking positively; positive thinking is not, contrary to what some teach, an unbiblical concept. (2) not only is there nothing wrong with doing one's best, it is a biblical principle and would be wrong not to strive to be the best we can be (see Prov. 12:11; 28:19; 14:4,23; 20:13; 18:9; 21:5; 27:23-27; 30:24-28; 22:29; 24:27)

But, let me equally candid: (1) This "you can do/become anything you want" is transparent nonsense. Not only scripture but common sense and experiences in life tell us that some goals are unachievable and there are some things I'll never be able to do or become regardless of my positive mental attitude and how hard I work at it. Ecc. 9:11 teaches that "chance" or "luck" sometimes wins out over skill and hard work. And all of us have known positive thinking, skillful, hard-working, Godly people who, for whatever reasons, just didn't see their dreams fulfilled. (2) The purpose of Christ's coming and teaching was not to make me materially successful. To use the scriptures---any scriptures---to teach that He did is to engage in the perversion of God's word. If judged by this standard, Paul was a failure. Everything of a material nature that could have led him to a life of "success" he forsook in order to gain Christ, Phil. 3:7-11, and many Christians today and in years past have stayed at the "bottom"--- socially, financially, etc.---for the same reason. To use material success as some measure of one's relationship to Christ fails to factor in (a) whether or not one, like Paul, has opted not to enjoy this "success" or (b) whether or not that, in spite of thinking every positive thought and exerting every effort they still, through no fault of their own, failed to achieve their goal(s). It is, among other things, spiritual elitism to look at those materially deprived and with goals unfulfilled and to tell them or think about them that something must be wrong in their spiritual lives that has brought their condition about.

The Context has absolutely nothing to do with the subject our text is applied to. In vs. 10, Paul rejoiced in the fact that the Philippians had revived their thought for him and now were able to do something they had hitherto be unable to do, even though they had been thinking of him all along. But Paul doesn't want to be misunderstood. He says he's learned to be content in whatever state he finds himself as he labors in the gospel and his joy is not so much in the reception of the material assistance from the Philippians but what that gift revealed about their spiritual character, vs. 11. He has learned, vs. 12, to be content in whatever state he finds himself in his work as an apostle and evangelist, including the extremes of abasement and abundance. Whether filled or hungry Paul had learned how to cope with these things. (Isn't it ironic that the context which contains the verse which allegedly teaches the "achieve anything materially you want" philosophy, actually finds Paul saying he's learned to be content in situations of material deprivation---

the exact opposite of what most the above-quoted individuals say we should not be content with!?)

The Meaning: It is in the midst of this sort of context that Paul makes his, "I can do all things in him that strengtheneth me," statement. As with all of the "all things" phrases, we need to be careful that we don't, unless warranted by the context, turn them into blank checks upon which we write just anything we want. We would do well to mentally insert the word "these" between "all" and "things" as we remember that "all things" must be limited to the things spoken of in the particular set of verses.

In this context, Paul has been speaking of the various conditions he found himself in as he preached the gospel: sometimes having an abundance of the material things he needed, sometimes not. But in whichever of these states he found himself he had learned to be content because he could do all these things in connection with Christ who provided the strength.

The Apostles and the Will of Christ
Special Topic
By Jon W. Quinn

Somebody once came up with a good idea that has proven useful to me. Whoever it was decided to print a series of Bibles which would use red ink to record the words of Jesus. Since that time many others have followed and now such is common. It is helpful to me when I am studying in the gospels and I am looking down a page for something I know Jesus said. Its easier to find.

But it seems that every good idea has its drawbacks. People can take a good idea and mess it up. But what could they possibly do to misuse this idea of putting the spoken words of Jesus in red?

Well, I heard one lady trying to explain her immoral behavior and her alleged "Christian faith" by saying that she only regards the "words printed in red in her Bible" to be important because "they are the ones which Jesus spoke." The studio audience seemed to think that made a lot of sense. It doesn't.

There are other areas in which this procedure has been used to minimize the importance of Biblical teaching which someone does not want to obey for one reason or another. A homosexual said. "Jesus never condemned homosexuality; that was Paul." Also, one fellow who did not

like what Peter said about baptism on the day of Pentecost said that what Peter taught ("Repent and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of your sins..." ACTS 2:38) was incorrect because Peter was under the influence of the teachings of John the Baptist, whose time had passed.

These views are the result of a failure to properly understand what an apostle is. The color of the ink does not determine what is important in the Bible and what is not (who would have ever thought that someone would need to be convinced that ink color doesn't mean a whole lot!). The bottom line is this: To accept the teachings of the writings of the entire New Testament is to accept the teachings of Christ; and to reject any New Testament doctrine is to reject Christ!

THE MEANING OF "APOSTLE"

"And when day came, He called His disciples to Him; and chose twelve of them, whom He also named as apostles." (LUKE 6:13). Jesus foresaw the writing of the New Testament. In fact, He planned for it and made provision for it to occur. Part of the provision for this involved the selecting from out of all His disciples twelve individuals whom He also appointed as apostles. Mark adds that Jesus "sent them out to preach." (MARK 3:14).

The verb form of the Greek word translated "apostle" is "apostolos" (apostolos). It means "to send." Jesus sent His apostles on what was essentially a teaching and preaching mission. Right away we ought to be able to see that to reject one who is sent to teach us something is to reject the one who is doing the sending.

The Old Testament uses the "to send" idea in several places. The Lord told Moses "I will send you to Pharaoh." (EXODUS 3:10). Now, exactly who did Pharaoh disobey when he refused to let Israel go? Moses? NO! He disobeyed God! The Lord asks the question of Isaiah, "Who shall I send?" to which Isaiah responds "Here am I, send me!" (ISAIAH 6:8). The Lord told Jeremiah "to all that I shall send you, you shall go." and to Ezekiel, "Son of man, I send you unto the people of Israel." (JEREMIAH 1:7; EZEKIEL 2:3). Now, if the people obeyed the words of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel they would be obeying the Lord who had sent them. But to reject the prophets was to reject God. It is absolutely no different with us rejecting those whom Jesus has selected and sent to us! In fact, it is Jesus (words printed in red for those who claim they only listen to the red ones) who said to His apostles; "He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me. He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward..." (Matthew 10:40,41).

THE APOSTLES: A UNIQUE GROUP

"...until the day in which He was taken up, after He had by the Holy Spirit given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen..." (ACTS 1:2). No apostle was self-appointed. They were not selected by another man, men, council or church but personally selected and appointed by Jesus.

Jesus chose His apostles so that they might accompany Him and then be sent out to preach the gospel. Jesus told them, "You are My witnesses because you have been with Me from the beginning." (JOHN 15:27). Only Paul is an exception to the rule, and yet even he was granted a post resurrection appearance of Jesus that He might be able to proclaim His eye witness account of the resurrection and Lordship of Christ (I CORINTHIANS 9:1; 15:4-9).

Additionally, the apostles were given inspiration so that what they taught either in speaking or in writing would indeed be what Jesus intended them to teach. God directly guided the apostles in revealing through them exactly what He chose. On the night before His crucifixion, Jesus said to His apostles, "These things I have spoken to you while abiding with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said unto you." (JOHN 14:25,26 c.f. JOHN 16:12,13).

The following day of Pentecost (seven and one half weeks later) began with the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles and the fulfillment of the Lord's promise (ACTS 2:1-4).

THE APOSTLES: THEIR CLAIMS

"And for this reason we constantly thank God that when you received from us the word of God's message, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which performs its work in you who believe." (I THESSALONIANS 2:13). In light of what we have already seen, we can understand how Paul, as an apostle, could refer to the things he wrote as "the word of God." It is because that is how Jesus planned it. To reject Paul's teaching because somebody didn't use red ink is silly!

It also helps us to understand some other statements which show the importance of obeying the teachings of the entire New Testament; "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep aloof from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example..." (II THESSALONIANS 3:6,7) and "What I am writing to you is the commandment of the Lord." (I CORINTHIANS 14:37).

Also, the apostle Peter said that the word that he had preached to them was "the living and abiding word of God." (see I PETER 1:22-25). The apostle John reminded the brethren that they, at the close of the first century, were to continue in what they had heard in the beginning years of the gospel (I JOHN 1:1-3; 2:7,24).

Early Christians highly valued the words of the apostles not because of the apostles themselves but because of the Lord who had sent them. At the end of the first century, Clement of Rome said, "The apostles received the word from Christ, and Christ from God." A short time later, Ignatius of Antioch said, "I do not, as Peter and John did, issue commandments unto you - they were apostles..." At the beginning of the second century Tertullian wrote in North Africa and said, "We Christians are forbidden to introduce anything on our own authority - our authorities are the Lord's apostles - and they introduce nothing on their own authority..."

So that is how it is. To reject anything the Bible teaches is to reject Christ Jesus Himself. You do not like something that Paul or Peter or John taught, but you still want to think of yourself as loyal to Christ? Then you're going to have to accept and obey the teachings of the apostles or be regarded by the Lord as unfaithful. Note the statement Jesus made concerning a group He sent out to teach: "The one who listens to you listens to Me, and the one who rejects you rejects Me; and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me. (LUKE 10:16). I am afraid it cannot be any plainer than that!

Final Page

Ten Dominant Moods In American Religion Today ***Warren E. Berkley***

This article is an effort to identify ten dominant moods in American religion today. I have no purpose to exhaust every possible trend. And I understand, when anyone sets about the task of identifying modern trends in religion or elements of popularity, you set yourself up for the work of revision. Things are changing at such a pace, what you write in the morning may need adjustments in the afternoon. Nevertheless, I thought it would be valuable to me to make such a list. Ten Dominant Moods in American Religion today:

1. Non-judgmental; resistant to discipline. Cultural pluralism and the pressure of being politically/religiously correct results in exalting as a

principle, the spirit of being “non-judgmental.” Whatever anybody wants to do about anything or everything, there is cultural pressure to relax, be accepting and never ask anyone to examine their beliefs and behavior. Yet the kindest thing you can do for anyone is tell them the truth. And “those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the test also may fear,” (1 Tim. 5:20). Sentimental silence is the best friend sin ever had. The friendly, diplomatic spirit toward error hastens the progress of apostasy, in whatever form it may assume.

2. Subjection, Emotional. That which is subjectively based proceeds from or takes place in a person’s mind, rather than from an external, objective source. When you do what you think and feel, rather than believe and obey the Word of God, the basis of your religious life is subjective and emotional; therefore, relative to how you feel at any time. “But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does,” (Jas. 1:25).

3. Coveting Excitement, Entertainment, Drama, & Style. With the advent of television, movies and internet media, there is greater demand for visual, external excitement. To be entertained is “more fun” than reading and studying. So we are constantly working on ways to supply more dazzle, sometimes with a loss of scriptural content. Popular worldly methods are being demanded in religious settings. Our commitment must as Paul expressed: “we preach Christ crucified,” (see 1 Cor. 1:18-2:5).

4. Ecumenical. The ecumenical spirit is to accept everybody as brothers and sisters, without regard to differing teaching and practice, as “the loving thing.” With only a confession of your faith in Christ accompanied by some involvement in “Evangelical religion”, the ecumenists embrace you with a claim of joint fellowship. “Unity in diversity” is the plea, and the discernment between truth and error required by Scriptures is set aside. Though not in a religious setting, Rodney King’s statement during the LA Riots captures the premise of ecumenical religion: “Why can’t we all just get along?” Of course we can, but how? The desire for unity can only be fulfilled by letting God’s truth be our authority. By our commitment to what God’s Holy Spirit has revealed, we can effectively endeavor “to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,” (Eph. 4:3).

5. Informal, Casual. Comfort has been put above reverence in our age. Being casual, relaxed and sporty – it is argued – is of greater significance than being reverent, fitting, appropriately dressed. Society is in a dress-down, casual mode. The danger lies in the message that worship is just like anything else. A change in dress code generally signals a change in attitude. Are we willing to regard worship with a leisure attitude? “Guard

your steps as you go to the house of God and draw near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools; for they do not know they are doing evil,” (Eccl. 5:1).

6. The Social Gospel. Interests in serving social needs and financing social causes is a ruling power in American religion. Today, the social gospel is alive in churches with social and benevolent programs to make this world a better place to live through counseling, physical fitness, various kinds of therapy, community involvement and sometimes political activism. Paul had a plan far more comprehensive and reaching to the cause of man’s problem: “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for every who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek,” (Rom. 1:16).

7. Biblical Ignorance. In American religion today, there is little interests in serious Bible study. Researchers George Gallup and Jim Castelli concluded, “Americans revere the Bible – but, by and large, they don’t read it, they have become a nation of biblical illiterates,” (www.crosswalk.com/faith/1218766.html - by Albert Mohler). Only when we read, can we enjoy a true knowledge of the mystery of Christ (Eph. 3:4).

8. Less preaching. Is preaching “a dying art.” In some places there is movement away from preaching toward a more popular (relevant?), multi-media presentation. There is a mood that seeks to gradually replace preaching with some form where entertainment and audience appeal has a higher place than instruction (diminishing the need to “convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching,” 2 Tim. 4:2). Talks that make people feel good enjoys greater popularity than the boldness of divine truth.

9. Worldly. To be worldly means to find your life in what the world offers instead of what God offers in Christ. To be worldly means, to seek the temporal thrills, ambitions and pleasures, with that priority ranked above godliness. Those captivated by the world may have “a form of godliness,” but by their attachment to the world they deny its power. “And from such people turn away,” (2 Tim. 3:5).

10. Misplaced emphasis on Numbers. Bigger is better. The emphasis on numbers leads directly to the introduction of modern marketing strategy into the church. The outcome is, we sell customer satisfaction instead of preaching the gospel. Instead of being followers of Christ, we follow the crowd and give them what they want to increase our attendance and contribution (so we can enlarge the crowd). Instead of worshipping in Spirit and truth, we adapt our worship to the changing needs of the public. This inordinate emphasis on numbers eventually let’s men

determine the work of the church instead of God. "The tendency to make Christianity fashionable, and carnally respectable, must be met at the cost of sneer and ridicule from any quarter," (Millennial Har., 1868).

If these "moods" I have identified can be viewed as soil, it is rich and fertile to receive the Charismatic seed. It is ripe to re-generate Calvinism and advance Ecumenism, with every attending error. To the extent these things play out among us, we stand at risk and the next generation stands at even greater risk. The answer is, teaching and practicing the inspired, sufficient Word. "...I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified," (Acts 20:32).