

# TRUTH

## I Am Not a Terrorist!

Joe R. Price

On Wednesday, January 2, Zacarias Moussaoui spoke the following in an Alexandria, Virginia courthouse: “In the name of Allah I do not have anything to plead. I enter no plea. Thank you very much.” The court entered a plea of not guilty to charges of conspiring with Osama bin Laden and others to murder thousands of people.

Moussaoui’s statement reminds us of some Bible pleas. King Saul, when confronted by the prophet Samuel confidently said, “I have performed the commandment of the Lord” (1 Sam. 15: 13). In effect he said, “I am not a sinner.” Gehazi told his master he “did not go anywhere” (2 Kings 5:25). With much bravado we hear Peter say, “I am not a denier” (Matt. 26:33-35). Although responsible for handing innocent Jesus over to the will of a blood-thirsty rabble, Pilate is heard to say “I am not a murderer” (Matt. 27:24).

Although King Saul said he was not a sinner, his plea did not correspond with the facts of the case. We judge Saul to have been disobedient because he did not follow the Lord’s command. Elisha was correct — Gehazi did go somewhere even though he said he did not. Although Peter said he would not deny Jesus it is simple enough to righteously judge that

he did indeed deny the Lord. In spite of Pilate’s solemn effort, he cannot escape a just judgment that he thwarted justice.

A comparable thing happens among those who teach, defend or have fellowship with error (2 John 9-11). Such pleas are heard today: “You cannot identify a person as a false teacher based only upon what he teaches.” “I am not a false teacher!” “I am not in fellowship with error and sin!” “I am not a compromiser of God’s word!” While we earnestly desire that nobody who is named a brother be a false teacher, the truth of God’s word assures us some have been and will be (Gal. 2:4-5; Acts 20:29-31; 1 Tim. 4:1-3; 2 Pet. 2:1-2). Therefore, we must diligently “test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1).

Our Lord Jesus warned us: “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits” (Matt. 7:15-16). King Saul was known by his fruits: oxen and sheep were still alive. Gehazi was known by his fruit: his hidden bounty of greed could not escape the eyes of God. Peter was known by his fruit: thrice he denied the Lord. Pilate was known by his fruit:

see “Not a Terrorist” on p. 119

*“And ye shall  
know the truth,  
and the truth  
shall make  
you free”  
(John 8:32).*

Vol. XLVI

No. 4

February 21, 2002



Vol. XLVI February 21, 2002 No. 4

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\$22.00 Per Year

Single Copies — \$2.00 each

Foreign Subscriptions — \$24.00

— Bulk Rates —

\$1.50 per subscription per month

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Subscriptions, renewals and other correspondence should be sent to Truth Magazine, P.O. Box 9670, Bowling Green, KY 42102.

Book orders should be sent to Truth Bookstore, P.O. Box 9670, Bowling Green, KY 42102. Phone: 1-800-428-0121.

Web Address: www.truthmagazine.com

Postmaster: Send change of address to P.O. Box 9670, Bowling Green, KY 42102.

Truth Magazine (ISSN 1538-0793) is published twice a month by Guardian of Truth Foundation, P.O. Box 9670, Bowling Green, KY 42102. Postage paid at Bowling Green, KY and additional mailing offices.

## Profane Esau

Mike Willis

The Scriptures give descriptions of the character of various men. Barnabas is described as “a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith” (Acts 11:24). The woman who anointed Jesus had “done what she could” (Mark 14:8). Job is described as “perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil” (Job 1:1).

In contrast to these good men, Esau is described as a “profane man” (Heb. 12:16). Let us see what characterized this man as “profane.”

### The Definition of “Profane”

The word “profane” is translated from *bebûlos* which means “1. accessible, lawful to be trodden; prop. used of places; hence, 2. profane, equiv. to *úîl* [i.e. unhallowed, common]” (Thayer 100). The *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* defines the word “as applied to persons,” “denotes profane men who are far from God; their unholiness includes ethical deficiency in accordance with the NT approach” (I:605). Arndt and Gingrich seem to catch its meaning in Hebrews 12:16 the best in their definition “irreligious” (138). Compare its usage in the following passages:

Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and *profane*, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers. . . (1 Tim. 1:9).

But refuse *profane* and old wives’ fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness (1 Tim. 4:7).

O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding *profane* and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called (1 Tim. 6:20).

But shun *profane* and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness (2 Tim. 2:16).

These uses show that “profane” carries the idea of one who is unholy and uninterested in holy things.

### Esau: The Profane Man

The life of Esau displays his profane ways. The Scriptures relate that Esau was the older of two sons born to Isaac and Rebekah (Gen. 25:19-28).  
*see “Esau” on p. 120*



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## I Have Met Diotrephes

Greg Litmer

At first glance you may be inclined to ask yourself, “What in the world does he mean by, I have met Diotrephes?” That is a good question. I use that statement in much the same way that John wrote of “the spirit of the antichrist” in 1 John 4:3. Obviously, I have not met the original Diotrephes that John wrote of in 3 John, but I have met those with his spirit or attitude, and that is how I mean the title of this article.

In 3 John, verses 9 and 10, we read, “I wrote something to the church; but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not accept what we say. For this reason, if I come, I will call attention to his deeds which he does, unjustly accusing us with wicked words; and not satisfied with this, neither does he himself receive the brethren, and he forbids those who desire to do so, and puts them out of the church.”

As one studies this short letter, it is apparent that John had previously written a letter to the church of which Gaius was a member and sent it by the hand of some brethren whom Gaius had graciously received. Diotrephes rejected both the letter and the messengers. The name of Diotrephes, while not as well known by non-Bible students as the name of Judas, has become synonymous among us for something very wicked and destructive in the church.

What did this man do? Diotrephes loved to have the preeminence. Things would go his way, or they would not go at all. You have met him too, haven't you? Maybe he is an elder, a preacher, a deacon, or one of the other members. Truth be told, I met a Diotrephes on more than one occasion who was a woman. It is a domineering person in a local congregation who demands their own way, come what may.

The Diotrephes about whom John was writing had even denied the authority of an apostle as he strove to control the local church. He refused to accept what John had written in an attempt to make himself appear greater. It reminds me of a time when I preached about pride in a local congregation, only to have one such individual, feeling the sting of the Word of God, leave the auditorium, enter an adult Bible class that took place immediately afterward, and inform the class that the Bible only condemned pride of man toward God, not man toward man. Thus, he rejected outright everything the Bible has to say about pride man to man, or man over man. That is the spirit of Diotrephes!

Diotrephes told lies about John with wicked words. Churches have been

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destroyed by individuals who sought to elevate themselves by wickedly spreading lies and half-truths about others. I have been a Christian now for 26 years and a preacher for almost 25. I have tried to pay attention and to learn as much as I can. I never cease to be amazed at what some brethren will say to hurt another or to build themselves up. I know of a church that was torn asunder, not by doctrinal matters, but by just plain meanness and the spirit of Diotrephes.

Diotrephes would not receive those who came in the name of John. I have known men in positions of leadership in a local congregation who arbitrarily decided whose meetings they would announce or advertise, not on the basis of doctrinal matters, but on the basis of their personal feelings. They sought to control even what the members would hear from faithful gospel preachers against whom those with the spirit of Diotrephes could bring no charge of false teaching at all. Those who stand for the truth and abide in the truth don't fear anything or anybody, but Diotrephes feared John who simply taught the truth with no "respect of persons."

Diotrephes sought to prejudice the minds of those faithful members of the congregation who wanted to help those

sent by John, even to the extent of railroading them out of the congregation. I heard one Christian threaten another by saying that he had "taken down" two other brothers from the pulpit, and he would do the same to this one, if the brother gave him any trouble.

I have heard Christians threaten to leave a congregation if they didn't get their way. I have heard Christians wickedly talked about behind their backs, only to be coddled by those with the spirit of Diotrephes if they thought it would help their position of preeminence.

John wasn't afraid of Diotrephes, and faithful Christians cannot be afraid of those with the spirit of Diotrephes either. Such an individual, or individuals, can only occupy their position of preeminence if other Christians let them. I am not talking about being unkind to such individuals, I am talking about being faithful to the Lord. I am talking about being concerned for their soul. Those with the spirit of Diotrephes must be stopped. God's Word is the instrument to stop them.

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*From The Searcher, June 2001*

## Eight Gifts That Do Not Cost a Cent

Consider these eight gifts that do not cost a cent:

- 1. The Gift of Listening.** But you must *really* listen. No interrupting, no daydreaming, no planning your response. Just listening.
- 2. The Gift of Affection.** Be generous with appropriate hugs, kisses, pats on the back, and handholds. Let these small actions demonstrate the love you have for family and friends.
- 3. The Gift of Laughter.** Clip cartoons. Share articles and funny stories. Your gift will say, "I love to laugh with you."
- 4. The Gift of a Written Note.** It can be a simple "Thanks for the help" note or a full sonnet. A brief, handwritten note may be remembered for a lifetime and may even change a life.
- 5. The Gift of a Compliment.** A simple and sincere, "You look great in red," "You did a super job," or "That was a wonderful meal" can make someone's day.
- 6. The Gift of a Favor.** Every day, go out of your way to do something kind.
- 7. The Gift of Solitude.** There are times when we want nothing better than to be left alone. Be sensitive to those times and give the gift of solitude to others.
- 8. The Gift of a Cheerful Disposition.** The easiest way to feel good is to extend a kind word to someone, really it's not that hard to say, "Hello" or "Thank You."

Author Unknown



## Divine Doctrine or Human Precepts?

The teaching of Jesus continually directs our attention to a single question by which we evaluate any teach-

ing: *Is the doctrine of divine origin or human invention?*

To the leaders of the Jews who had rejected the baptism of John, Jesus asked, “The baptism of John, whence was it — from heaven or from men?” (Matt. 21:25). Baptism following repentance had been taught by John as a commandment, not a suggestion. When a teaching is lawfully advanced as a matter of mandatory faith and practice, it must be of divine origin. If we teach human tradition or even personal conscience as mandatory or impose such as tests of fellowship, we incur the condemnation of God (1 Tim. 4:1-3).

Nowhere is the binding of human tradition condemned in clearer terms than by Jesus’ rebuke of the Pharisees for doing that very thing. Notice the situation as recorded in Mark’s account (Mark 7:1-13, ASV):

And there are gathered together unto him the Pharisees, and certain of the scribes, who had come from Jerusalem, and had seen that some of his disciples ate their bread with defiled, that is, unwashen, hands. (For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands diligently, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders; and when they come from the market-place, except they bathe themselves, they eat not; and many other things there are, which they have received to hold, washings of cups, and pots, and brasen vessels.) And the Pharisees and the scribes ask him, Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat their bread with defiled hands? And he said unto them, Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoreth me with their lips, But their heart is far from me. But in vain do they worship me, Teaching as their doctrines the precepts of men. Ye leave the commandment of God, and hold fast the tradition of men. And he said unto them, Full well do ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your tradition. For Moses said, Honor thy father and thy mother; and, He that speaketh evil of father or mother, let him die the death: but ye say, If a man shall say to his father or his mother, That wherewith thou mightest have been profited by me is Corban, that is to say, Given to God; ye no longer suffer him to do ought for his father or his mother; making void the word of God by your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things ye do.

Jesus condemned both addition to and subtraction from God’s commandments in the same rebuke. We must do the same thing. It is never “safe” to change the word of God. It is no more tolerable to add a command than to disregard one. The Pharisees had done both. The washing they mandated was not required by the law of God though the Pharisees required it of all whom they would accept. In this way, they added to the commandments of God. The justification for one not to provide needed assistance to his father and mother by accounting the funds for such as “Corban” was an effort to release one from an obligation mandated by God. In this way, the Pharisees loosed that which God bound in the commandments of the law. Either way, the divine commandments were rejected or made void by human tradition. Jesus showed no preference for one disregard of divine authority over the other. Both were absolutely condemned!

### The Same Mindset

Why did Jesus so strongly condemn changes to God’s commands whether by addition or subtraction? The answer is simple — either way they involved the elevation of human thoughts or practices to the level reserved solely for divine law. The same mind set is behind both avenues of change. It is a mind set which is lifted up with human pride to the point that one’s own thoughts and ways have greater sway than God’s thoughts and ways. When Isaiah urged, “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto Jehovah,” he reminded them of God’s admonition to cause such: “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith Jehovah. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isa. 55:6-9). Isaiah concluded by bringing the focus back to the needed point of emphasis — *the divinely revealed word*. The prophet quoted God as reminding all of the efficacious nature of his word: “So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it” (Isa. 55:11). God’s word will do the job he wants done. He needs no help from human alterations.

## Principle Seen in Colossians 2

In writing the Christians at Colossae, Paul warned against the errors of early Gnosticism mixed with Jewish Essenism. The teachers of this heresy used “persuasiveness of speech” to “delude” the saints (Col. 2:4). But the apostle reminded them that only in Christ are “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden” (Col. 2:2-3). And where were they to go to find such in Christ? “As therefore ye received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and builded up in him, and established in your faith, even *as ye were taught*” (Col. 2:6-7). Paul had earlier noted that their faith and hope were based upon that which they “heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel” (Col. 1:5). The source of all knowledge and blessings was the truth of the gospel as originally received.

But what would be the result of allowing changes in the original message? It is of that very possibility the apostle Paul warned in these words: “Take heed lest there shall be any one that maketh spoil of you through his philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ” (Col. 2:8).

There is a clear contrast in the companion epistles of Ephesians and Colossians between teaching “not after Christ” and teaching which originates from Christ. Paul instructs the readers to “let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” and then declares the result upon their lives: “Whatever you do in word or in deed, do *all in the name of the Lord Jesus*” (Col. 3:16-17). To the Ephesians, he contrasts the walk of the old man in lusts and ignorance with the path of the new man (Eph. 4:17-24). The change in direction came then as it comes now — as we “*learn Christ*” (Eph. 4:20). As they “heard Him, and were taught of Him, even as truth is in Jesus” so must we be (Eph. 4:21). Then and only then can we be a new man in Christ “created in righteousness and holiness of truth” (Eph. 4:24). Truth originates with no human law, custom, or practice. Truth has Christ as its source.

Rather than partaking of the riches provided in Christ, Christians who submit to human tradition become the spoil of those who change the gospel. Those who so alter God’s word may promise great blessings or make pretense of great piety. They may even claim their teaching is the logical end of a sequence of reasoned principles. But the question to be asked is this: *Is their teaching the same as that received in the word of God without addition or subtraction?* Teaching that arises from any other source is condemned as “not after Christ.”

**Philosophy (*philosophia*).** Though this word was used by the Greeks to describe the greatest achievement of the intellect, this is the only time it is used in the New Testament and it stands in contrast to true knowledge, wisdom and hope which come only by Christ through the gospel. Josephus, the Jewish historian, used this word to describe the system of thought behind the main sects of first century Palestine. He said, “There are three forms of philosophy among the Jews. The followers of the first school are called Pharisees, of the second Sadducees, and of the third Essenes” (Jewish War, II.viii.2). Like men of our time, all needed to forsake schools of thought originated and fostered by human innovation. They needed to abide in the doctrine of Christ (2 John 9-11).

**Deceit (*apate*).** Vine says that the word refers to “that which gives a false impression, whether by appearance, statement or influence” (*Expository Dictionary of N.T. Words*, 1:279). Deception and lying have always been a part of the devil’s arsenal to lead people astray. Innuendos, misleading labels, partial truths, misrepresentation and brazen lies are the tools by which Satan attacks truth and increases his minions.

The cause of truth is not advanced by such devices. When we do not focus on what the text says, without addition or subtraction, we may get a false impression rather than truth. When we teach that misrepresentation to others, we are guilty of deception in leading others away from God’s word and towards our perversion of it, whether by addition or subtraction. How do we avoid this result? By searching the Scriptures daily to see if the teaching done is so (Acts 17:11).

**Tradition (*paradosis*) of men.** The Greek word for “tradition” refers literally to that which is handed down. When the handing down is done by God or one inspired of God, the resulting tradition is binding (1 Cor. 11:2; 2 Thess. 2:15; 3:6 cf. 1 Thess. 2:13). When the handing down is of human origin, the tradition is but a vain path opposed to God’s will (Mark 7:1-13; Matt. 15:1-9). Beliefs of past or present uninspired, reputed brethren do not establish truth. Divisions based upon following after human will or personalities are condemned of God (1 Cor. 1:10-13; 3:1-9; 4:6). The solution is given in the very verses declaring the problem — focus on the written word without any alteration from any man. Any law of man added after the completed revelation of God may not be placed upon a par with the doctrine of Christ. Any human attempt to diminish or abrogate the provisions of Christ’s doctrine stands condemned. Paul warned of later day attempts to draw others away by

Jeff Jacoby

## The Road to Treason

It isn't the case that the parents of John Walker, the Marin County child of privilege turned Taliban terrorist, never drew the line with their son.

True, they didn't do so when he was 14 and his consuming passion was collecting hip-hop CDs with especially nasty lyrics.

And true, they didn't put their foot down when he announced at 16 that he was going to drop out of Tamiscal High School, the elite "alternative" school where students determined their own course of study and only saw a teacher once a week.

And granted, they didn't interfere when he abruptly decided to become a Muslim after reading "The Autobiography of Malcolm X," grew a beard, and took to wearing long white robes and an oversized skullcap.

On the contrary: His father was "proud of John for pursuing an alternative course" and his mother told friends that it was "good for a child to find a passion."

Nor did they object when he began spending more and more time at a local mosque and set about trying to memorize the Koran.

Nor when he asked his parents to pay his way to Yemen so he could learn to speak "pure" Arabic.

Nor when they learned that his new circle of friends included gunmen who had been to Chechnya to fight the Russians.

Nor when he headed to Pakistan to join a madrassah in a region known to be a stronghold of Islamist extremists.

His parents also didn't balk when he went to fight in Afghanistan, but that, at least, they didn't know about: Walker hadn't told them.

Perhaps by that point he had learned to take their consent for granted.

Only once, it seems, did Frank Lindh and Marilyn Walker actually deny their son something he wanted. When

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human tradition that added and subtracted from law as stated by God (1 Tim. 4:1-5). The inspired writer condemns both kinds of changes as "doctrines of demons."

That appeals to philosophy, deceit, and the traditions of men are condemned by the apostle is beyond dispute. But what examples of such does Paul give to the readers? When we examine the list cited in Colossians 2:16-23, the same pattern noted by Jesus is seen. In some cases, men sought to bind a practice which God did not bind (judging over meat, drink, etc.). In other cases, men sought to justify doing what God specifically condemned (worship of angels, etc.). Either way, it came of the same mind set willing to replace God's law with human tradition.

Brethren, it is never safe to either add to or subtract from God's law. However well-intentioned the change might be, it leads souls away from God and towards mere man. However pious the sound of the variation, it is at variance with divine revelation. Whatever the credentials of the one seeking the alteration, he is not of deity. Whatever the justification for the deviation, God has given no man or angel the authority to change one principle, precept, privilege or proclamation of the gospel (Gal. 1:6-9).

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he first adopted Islam and took the name Suleyman, they refused to use it and insisted on calling him John. After all, he had been named for one of the giants of our time: John Lennon.

Their refusal must have amazed him. For as long as he could remember, his oh-so-progressive parents had answered “Yes” to his every whim, indulged his every fancy, permitted, even praised, his every passion. The only thing they insisted on was that nothing be insisted on. Nothing in his life was important enough for them to make an issue of: not his schooling, not his religion, not his appearance, not even whether he stayed in America or moved, while still a minor, to a benighted Third World oligarchy halfway around the world. Nothing.

Except, of course, their right to call him by the name of their favorite Beatle.

Devout practitioners of the self-obsessed non-judgmentalism for which the Bay Area is renowned, Lindh and Walker appear never to have rebuked their son or criticized his choices. In their world, there were no absolutes, no fixed truths, no mandatory behavior, no thou-shalt-nots. If they had one conviction, it was that all convictions are worthy — that nothing is intolerable except intolerance.

But even in Marin County, there are times when children need to hear “No” and “Don’t.” They need to know that there are limits they must respect and expectations they must try to live up to. If they cannot find those limits and expectations at home, they are apt to look for them elsewhere. *Newsweek* calls it “truly perplexing” that Walker, who “grew up in possibly the most liberal, tolerant place in America . . . was drawn to the most illiberal, intolerant sect in Islam.” There is nothing perplexing about it. He craved standards and discipline. Mom and Dad didn’t offer any. The Taliban did.

Even when it was clear that their son was sinking into

Islamist fanaticism, they wouldn’t pull back on the reins. When Osama bin Laden’s terrorists bombed the USS Cole and killed 17 American servicemen, Walker e-mailed his father that the attack had been justified, since by docking the ship in Yemen, the United States had committed “an act of war.” Lindh now says that the message “raised my concerns,” but that didn’t stop him from wiring Walker another \$1,200. After all, says Dad, “my days of molding him were over.” It isn’t clear that they ever began.

It undoubtedly came as a jolt to his parents when Walker turned up at the fortress near Mazar-i-Sharif, sporting an AK-47 and calling himself Abdul Hamid. But the revelation that their son had enlisted in Al Qaeda and supported the September 11 attacks brought no words of reproach, or self-reproach, to their lips.

Walker deserved “a little kick in the butt” for keeping them in the dark about his plans, his father said, but otherwise they just wanted to “give him a big hug.” His mother, meanwhile, was quite sure that “if he got involved with the Taliban he must have been brainwashed. . . . When you’re young and impressionable, it’s easy to be led by charismatic people.”

Yes, it is, and it’s a pity that didn’t occur to her sooner. If she and Lindh had been less concerned with flaunting their open-mindedness and more concerned with developing their son’s moral judgment, he wouldn’t be where he is today. Walker is responsible for his own behavior and he will pay the price the law requires. But his road to treason and Jihad didn’t begin in Afghanistan. It began in Marin County, with parents who never said “No.”

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Mark Mayberry

## Resisting Relevancy

Because God's word is an expression of eternal truth, it is always relevant (John 8:31-32; 17:17). What do we

mean by the term "relevant"? If something is relevant to a given situation, it is pertinent, appropriate, meaningful, applicable, etc. The Holy Scriptures, inspired of God, certainly fit this definition. Unfortunately, many today doubt the reality of revelation. Having lost faith in biblical veracities — heaven, hell, right, wrong, moral absolutes, etc. — they still long for some kind of religious expression. Accordingly, they set aside a heavenly-oriented saving gospel for an earthly-oriented social gospel. Instead of faithfully preaching the Word, they offer faithless distortions of the same (Gal. 1:6-9).

### Trivialization

In an effort to achieve relevancy, many trivialize the gospel of Christ. Let us not forget that the gospel is God's power to salvation (Rom. 1:16-17; 1 Cor. 1:18-2:5). Men are drawn to God through the agency of the Word (John 6:44-63).

**The Church of England** is currently engaged in an ad campaign designed to reach a more youthful audience. Mimicking the popular slogan of the English *National Canine Defense League* — "A Dog is for life, not just for Christmas," — one poster reads: "The Church is for Life. Not just for Christians." Quoting from the theme song of the television sitcom *Friends*, another poster says, "I'll be here for you, when the rain starts to fall. Friends. Start a new series of them." Seeking to connect with a youth culture given over to willful physical disfigurement, a third poster says, "Body piercing? Jesus had his done 2,000 years ago." Another ad, apparently aimed at a youth culture steeped in the use of drugs, says, "Life gone to Pot? Made a Hash of things? Things not too Easy? Love is the drug."

Arun Arora, the 29-year-old church communication director who created these ads, said: "The purpose of these posters is to try and grab the attention of a group of people with whom the Church has lost contact." He said, "Hopefully it will get people to stop and think. References to drugs and contemporary culture will strike a chord with young people disillusioned with drugs, looking for answers to spiritual questions." Arora acknowledged, "We are aware that some of the posters may be upsetting

to people not in the target age group but we have not set out to specifically annoy or upset people." "We think the posters have a sense of humor and appeal about them that will speak directly to young people," he added. "If they do that, then they would have been a success."<sup>1</sup>

A second example also comes from the shores of England. Attempting to woo young people back to church, a British missionary agency has produced a short film titled *An Absence of Stones* with teenagers playing the leading parts. It features Jesus as a 15-year-old schoolboy. Mary Magdalene is a promiscuous young woman who becomes pregnant, initially seeks an abortion, but finally decides to raise her child as a single mother. The Judas character is played by a drug-addicted schoolgirl who betrays Jesus for a "hit" of cocaine. Instead of a crucifixion scene, Jesus is murdered by a friend, and then is resurrected in a beautiful resort town in the English countryside. References to sex, drugs and violence fill this 30-minute film.<sup>2</sup>

Such a spirit of trivialization can also be observed among brethren. How do we make this same mistake? By emphasizing entertainment rather than edification. By allowing secular and social activities to become the drawing card. By thinking that folks will be attracted to the building instead of the worship conducted therein. By relying upon rhetorical gifts rather than the gospel message.

Many sermons are long on stories, cute sayings, personal anecdotes, jokes, illustrations, but short on Scripture. Yet, amusing anecdotes are not equivalent to parables. Instead of directing our attention to the word of God, secular illustrations often digress and distract. Moreover, invoking popular culture can have the dubious effect of endorsing it. To illustrate a sermon by referring to *Friends*, *Seinfeld*, the *X-Files*, or some other hit show, in a positive light, suggests that everyone watches and finds it entertaining. However, most modern entertainment is hopelessly corrupt. Christians must have no part in the unfruitful deeds of darkness (Eph. 5:11-12; Rev. 18:4-8). Discernment is required (Phil. 1:9-11).

### Tolerance

In an effort to achieve relevancy, many tolerate sin and error. Let us not forget that ongoing fellowship with sin is

prohibited (2 Cor. 6:14-18; Eph. 5:1-14). Divine fellowship is based upon walking in the light (1 John 1:5-7).

**The United Methodist Church** has begun a new media campaign designed to attract newcomers into their assemblies. One commercial, which begins “It rained today,” suggests a connection between stormy weather and spiritual longing. Yet, the message is deliberately vague. No reference is made to the Bible, heaven, hell, or the need for salvation. In the entire series, only two ads mention Jesus.

In another group of commercials, the message is purportedly a love letter from God: “I miss you, I miss the sound of your voice, the late night conversations. . . . I tried to call but there’s no answer. But I’m ready to call again, if you are.” In certain ads, a man supplies the voice of God. In others, God’s voice is that of a woman.

Another series features men and women from a spectrum of ages and races who affirm various things that they believe: Some are innocuous: “I believe we should all play nicely together.” “I believe we’re all too preoccupied with money.” “I believe too much television is bad for our children.” Others are steeped in political correctness: “I believe none of us is qualified to judge the lives of others.” “I believe sometimes it’s hard to believe in anything.” “I believe when you truly embrace diversity, you embrace God.”

The TV, radio, and print advertisements all conclude with the same theme: “Our hearts, our minds and our door are always open. The people of the United Methodist Church.”<sup>3</sup> According to this world view, tolerance trumps all other virtues. Modern culture is tolerant of everything except those who are intolerant.

Such a spirit of toleration can also be observed among brethren. How do we make this same mistake? By tolerating sin within our fellowship. By justifying continued fellowship with error based on a perversion of Romans 14. Contextually, it is obvious that Paul is discussing matters of indifference: God cares not whether one eats meats or is a vegetarian. Tolerance is demanded for those who hold differing opinions on such things. However, this in no wise suggests that broad mindedness applies to adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, or other such sins (Gal. 5:19-21). Fellowship cannot be extended to those who teach damnable heresy (2 Pet. 2:1-3; 2 John 8-11).

## Timidity

In an effort to achieve relevancy, many manifest a spirit of timidity. Let us not forget that error must be confronted and exposed (Eph. 6:10-13; Tit. 1:10-13). Faithful evangelists will preach the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:17-21, 26-32).

As an illustration of this problem, consider *The Andy Griffith Bible Study Series*, widely popular among denominations and digressive churches of Christ. Episodes from the old *Andy Griffith* TV show are used to illustrate biblical values. Each study offers a handful of Scriptures coupled with a series of questions intended to help participants connect the show with some spiritual concept.

Thomas Nelson Publishers promotes this product with the following blurb: “For generations, stories have been used to teach universal truths. In keeping with this time-honored tradition, this new four-volume *Andy Griffith Bible Study Series* has been developed, which uses the classic stories of Mayberry to illustrate biblical truths. Each session is hosted by Christian comedian, Dennis Swanberg. In this first volume you will learn about judgment in ‘Opie and the Spoiled Kid,’ work in ‘Rafe Hollister Sings,’ mentoring in ‘The Rivals,’ and deception in ‘Aunt Bee’s Medicine Man.’” The second volume is similarly hyped: “In this second release from the popular *Andy Griffith Bible Study Series*, we will see lessons taught from great shows, such as ‘A Wife for Andy,’ which will teach us about meddling, ‘High Noon in Mayberry,’ about judging, ‘Barney’s First Car’ about foolish pride, and ‘The Great Filling Station Robbery’ about accusations.”<sup>4</sup>

During mid-week (spelling intentional, MM) Bible class, participants watch an entertaining rerun of *Andy, Barney, and the gang*. Then a class facilitator (no teacher’s manual is available, only a facilitator’s handbook) promotes group discussion about what it all means. Deep stuff, this is.

The popularity of this series is evidenced by the fact that, as of the writing of this article, Thomas Nelson Publishers was completely sold out. A web search also indicates its widespread use among churches that claim to be “of Christ.”

Many prefer the Bible according to Barney. “WWJD” has been replaced by the question, “What would Andy do?” And why not? The lessons are non-threatening and non-

controversial. Doctrinal distinctiveness is avoided. Such is to be expected in the fictitious town of Mayberry.

Perhaps you will remember that Aunt Bee, Andy, Opie, Barney, and Gomer attend the “All Saints Church,” a non-denominational assembly, where the most memorable lesson presented from the pulpit focused on the need to “Slow Down . . . Relax . . . Take Life Easy!” Of course such a series is popular: These lessons are so generic that they could be preached in any pulpit in this land. The meat of the gospel is boiled down to mush!

Such a spirit of timidity can also be observed among brethren. How do we make this same mistake? From a biblical standpoint, it is not enough to stay in safe territory. The Christian soldier must not loiter behind the lines of battle. Sin must be confronted, and error exposed. Wherever the conflict occurs, there the battle must be joined (2 Cor. 6:4-7; 10:3-6; 1 Tim. 1:18-19).

In many non-institutional churches of Christ, one no longer hears a distinctive message. The true church of Scripture is not contrasted with denominationalism. Instead of consistently confronting error, professional pulpiteers speak the Ashdodic language of Max Lucado, Rick Warren, Charles Swindoll, etc. Yes, they may preach some of the truth, but refrain from proclaiming all the truth.

Unfortunately, many so-called gospel preachers avoid current and controversial issues. They prove their fidelity by fighting yesterday’s battles, but they remain silent about current issues threatening the church. It is not enough to attack the enemy stronghold of yesteryear; we must also confront the adversary in his present, entrenched position. Many brethren will not preach on fellowship, marriage-divorce-and-remarriage, modesty, morality, dancing, drinking, smoking, gambling, improper choices of entertainment, participation in the United Way, Masonry, etc. If these issues are addressed, lessons often lack specificity and necessary application.

If some worldly-minded, pseudo-saint wants to engage in worldly activities, the evangelist who has learned how to

go along and get along will not press the issue. If someone has a sore spot, he is not going to rub it! The hireling will preach only what is safe. He is not going to rock the boat. He cowers before the cultural accommodationists, saying “Peace, peace” (Jer. 8:8-12).

Gospel preachers must follow the example of Paul who did not shrink back from declaring anything profitable, but preached the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:20-21, 26-27). Like Jeremiah, evangelists of today will speak all that God has commanded, and will not omit a single word (Jer. 26:2). In the spirit of Ezekiel, they will forcefully, fervently, and faithfully proclaim God’s word. Let us realize that God’s fierce judgment will be poured out on all those who whitewash wrongdoing (Ezek. 13:1-16).

### Conclusion

The aforementioned errors grow out of a mistaken concept of relevancy. God’s word is always relevant (2 Pet. 1:2-3). Let us appeal, not to the carnal man, but to those higher and better qualities — the things of the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:6-16). Let us faithfully sound forth the gospel message (2 Tim. 4:1-5). This is the only hope of lost mankind.

### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> Nick Britten, “Church Adverts Attacked as Blasphemous,” <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/>, Filed: 8/31/2001; along with other internet news stories posted to <http://news.crosswalk.com/>, September, 2001, etc.

<sup>2</sup> Victoria Combe, “Schools to Show ‘Cocaine and Sex’ Film About Jesus,” <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/>, Filed: 9/4/2001.

<sup>3</sup> “Igniting Ministry: A Media Campaign of The United Methodist Church,” <http://ignitingministry.org/spots/>, September, 2001.

<sup>4</sup> “Andy Griffith Bible Study Series,” <http://www.thomasnelson.com/>, September, 2001.

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Ron Halbrook

## God Still Rules in Times of National Tragedy

My article entitled "God Still Rules in Times of National Tragedy" appeared in the December 6, 2001 *Truth*

*Magazine*. The first paragraph included the following statistics:

Five to six thousand people were slaughtered on September 11, 2001 when Muslim terrorists hijacked four jet airliners, crashing two into the twin World Trade Center towers in New York City, one into the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., and one into a field southeast of Pittsburgh, PA. More Americans were killed on this day than on any other single day since the Battle of Antietam on September 17, 1862 in the War Between the States when over 20,000 died. This day will be remembered in our history as a day of infamy alongside the Japanese sneak attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 when over 2,800 died.

By the time the article appeared, the number killed on September 11, 2001 had been revised to about 3,000-3,500, still a staggering slaughter. Authorities have faced a daunting task in trying to verify how many died at the World Trade Center towers. The heat of the fires was so intense that it was not until December 19, 2001 that all the fires were reported extinguished. Many bodies of the dead will never be discovered and identified; they were cremated by the inferno which consumed the twin towers. Cleanup efforts in New York City will continue for months to come.

It has been called to my attention that the Battle of Antietam resulted in over 20,000 casualties including all the wounded and missing, with about 4,500 of that number identified as killed. That death toll remains the highest for a single day in U.S. history.

The events of September 11, 2001 have had a much-needed sobering effect on America. There has been a wellspring of concern, sympathy, and generosity toward the victims of the attack. Many of our citizens have paused to reconsider their sense of values and their priorities in life, realizing that "a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Luke

12:15). Divorce rates have dropped, if only temporarily. The name of God has been invoked and the need for God widely acknowledged.

While we are thankful to see these good signs, it does not appear that they will translate into genuine repentance and reformation of life on any wide scale. The events of September 11 have given Christians some golden opportunities to talk with people about their souls. A few restorations and baptisms have been reported. What is needed and still lacking is a general spirit of repentance throughout our land.

As happened when God used Assyria to chastise Israel, then destroyed Assyria, and when God used Babylon to chastise Judah, then destroyed Babylon, God has used Muslim terrorists to chastise America, then destroyed their al Qaeda organization and the Taliban government in Afghanistan which succored it. We should not be lulled into a false sense of pride and security by the latter development. God still rules the nations and takes account of the many sins of America.

God's providential use of the Assyrians, Babylonians, and Muslims does not mean he is responsible for their evil spirit and violence. They chose their own character and deeds, but God in his providence overrules the evil of men to serve his own benevolent purposes. Through his gracious providence and chastisement, he seeks to extend the life of our nation, not to cut it short. Through his loving providence, he seeks to save souls, not to destroy them.

This is a time for sober reflection and self-examination, godly sorrow and genuine repentance for sin, prayers for our leaders and citizens, and fervent, unrelenting efforts to proclaim the gospel of Christ as long as the patience of God prevails and permits.

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## Tactics Of Divisive Men

Our title is our theme. First, though, consider the character of truth, love, peace, and unity. It acts “with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love” (Eph. 4:2). It also stimulates others “unto love and good works” (Heb. 10:24). It is the application of true wisdom embodied in one who “is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy” (Jas. 3:17). If you are wondering whether a man is devious and divisive, check the contents of their conduct as displayed above. “Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them” (Matt. 7:20).

### Tactics Of A Divisive Man

Lacking the character of a sincere saint, the divisive man:

**1. Will seek to play the part of a poor, persecuted soul who is suffering unjustly.** He will play on your sympathy and make it appear that efforts to lead him to repentance are just more evidence of “the abuse and unfair treatment” that is being heaped upon him.

**2. Often enlists others to do his “dirty work.”** He will not be the lead spokesman, but will put others up front to carry the ball for him. He will make one of his deluded admirers feel important by allowing him to raise contentious questions. The “issues” are simply the divisive man’s agenda, but he will not tell his puppets that. He wants them to feel like they are men of strong faith, so he puts them forth. They do not realize they are his pawns (cf. Absalom, 2 Sam. 15).

**3. Casts aspersions against the elders, or the preacher.** If he can sunder the eldership, he will do so. If he can separate the preacher from one of the elders, he will do it. If he can cast doubt on the motives of the elders and/or the preacher, he will do that, too. Doubt is one of his greatest weapons. Doubt undermines influence and destroys confidence in another. The divisive man knows this. So, he plants his seeds of doubt and waits for them to take root in our hearts.

**4. Seeks to bind his human opinions and points to opposition to them as being from those who “don’t**

**love the truth.”** He wants to appear as the Savior of the church. He beguiles others and makes them think he is the only one “standing for the truth.” “We’ve got too much money in the bank. Gospel preachers are starving while our elders hoard money.” He may or may not be correct, but it does not matter. He simply needs a weapon. (Such men should be asked to make a special monthly pledge to support a preacher in the Philippines from their own pocket.)

“We sing songs which teach error. It’s as much a sin to sing error as to preach it.” He ignores poetic language and appeals to help him see that certain hymns are not teaching error. He has “an issue,” and he means to bind it. He has selected “several songs” which “should be torn out of our songbooks.” A few, perhaps with more zeal than good sense, will be aroused to take up his crusade. Result? Hearts bleed. Good men plead. A church is in turmoil.

**5. Shows false remorse “over the trouble some have caused.”** He creates more favor by acting as though he is “heartbroken over all that has happened.” He never, though, will admit any fault, any wrong. If he does, he does so to add to his martyr status. Any confession he may make will be couched in “if I’ve done anything wrong.” Often, after getting rid of the preacher (his hidden goal), he will speak well of the preacher as he is leaving and will speak openly of how he “wishes it had never come to this.” He may even call the preacher and express his sorrow “for the way things turned out.” (I know such things happen. I have received such “apologies” and phone calls!)

May God help us to avoid such a spirit among us. “Let brotherly love continue” (Heb. 13:1).

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Renew Promptly

Kevin Maxey

## Apostle Ron

I just had a most horrible experience. I have been cursed by apostle Ron. My brother Mike was invited by a

co-worker who said, “Come to my church and meet a real apostle.” Mike accepted the invitation and asked me to come along. We went to their church building, and sure enough, we met an apostle. It said so right on his desk. Are there real apostles of Christ living today? Read what apostle Ron said, compare him to the apostles you read about in the New Testament, and judge for yourself.

### **Apostle Ron said we were like Satan for testing him.**

His newspaper ad says, “We are a Full Gospel Ministry that displays healing, miracles, signs, and wonders.” We asked Ron to display to us these very things. He refused and charged that we were testing God like the devil tested Jesus. We were not testing God; we were testing him.

It is not demonic to test someone. Jesus praised the Ephesian church for testing false apostles. “You have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars” (Rev. 2:2). Why does apostle Ron say we are wrong to test him when the very same Holy Spirit, that he claims to work by, calls the Christians in Berea “noble” for testing even the apostle Paul? “These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so” (Acts 17:11). The apostle Paul, who tells us to imitate his example (1 Cor. 11:1), determined to “cut off” those who “are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ” (2 Cor. 11:12-13). Again, if apostle Ron is led by the Holy Spirit, why does he contradict the express command of the Holy Spirit in 1 John 4:1 when he reveals, “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.” Apostle Ron does not follow the same Spirit I read about in the New Testament.

### **Apostle Ron refused to confirm his apostleship.**

Jesus sent his personally chosen apostles out with signs of confirmation (Mark 16:14-20). Ron could not produce such confirmation. Apostle Ron declined to “drink anything deadly” like Jesus said his true apostles could (Mark 16:17). Ron refused to go to the cemetery or funeral home

to “raise the dead” like Christ and his apostles did (Matt. 10:8; John 11:38-44; Mark 5:21-43; Acts 20:9). Ron would not go to the hospital and heal all the sick like Jesus and his apostles, who “healed *all* who were sick” (Matt. 8:16; 4:24; Acts 5:15-16; Luke 4:40; 6:19; 9:6). Ron did not perform miracles “immediately” like Christ and his apostles, but rather told us to wait until his next healing service. The word “immediately” is used 23 times in reference to the miracles of Jesus and his apostles. Ron was unable to strike me blind like Paul struck Elymas (Acts 13:8). Apostle Paul did not refuse to show signs confirming his apostleship. “Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds” (2 Cor. 12:12). Apostle Ron is not like the apostles I read about in the New Testament.

A true doctor gladly shows confirmation of his right to practice medicine, while a false physician will not. No sane person would agree to go under the knife of a counterfeit healer who refuses to show his credentials. Self-acclaimed and scripturally unconfirmed modern religious healers who operate spiritual malpractice on the souls of men will face eternal consequences, “whose end will be according to their works” (2 Cor. 11:15).

### **Apostle Ron said we were carnal for opposing him.**

Vine’s *Dictionary* says carnal means, “‘having the nature of flesh,’ i.e., sensual, controlled by animal appetites . . . having its seat in the animal nature, or excited by it . . . pertaining to the natural, transient life of the body” (89). Who is really carnal? Mike and I assemble with Christians who worship God in the humble basement of a German print shop, with no plans, like apostle Ron, to build a \$10 million building, and he calls us “carnal.” Search as much as you like, but you will not find New Testament apostles constructing multi-million dollar megaplexes. We praise God, as the New Testament apostles command, “singing and making melody in your heart” (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16), not with the physical instrument, and Ron calls us “physical.” We worship “decently and in order” (1 Cor. 14:40), again as the New Testament apostles command, and not in an emotional frenzy where, as his newspaper ad claims you can “*feel the electricity* of the praise,” and he says we



are the ones who are “sensual” and “controlled by animal appetites.” Who is really carnal?

**Apostle Ron said God talks to him.** If God talks to people today apart from his word, will someone please explain what God’s voice sounds like? When God spoke to Moses it was a clear audible voice. “God answered him by voice” (Exod. 19:19). All Israel heard the voice of God at Mount Sinai. “We have heard His voice from the midst of the fire” (Deut. 5:23-24). Adam said to God, “I heard your voice in the garden” (Gen. 3:10). They were not listening to their feelings or conscience. They heard God’s audible voice.

Serious consequences fall upon one who speaks falsely on behalf of another. If I went around town telling people you said things you never did say, our legal system could find me guilty of slander. Today people are running around claiming that God told them things he never did say. This is no small thing. What does God think of such presumptuous speech? Under Old Testament law, such a one was worthy of death! Read carefully:

“Woe to the foolish prophets, who follow their own spirit and have seen nothing! . . . saying, ‘Thus says the Lord!’ But the Lord has not sent them . . . You say, ‘The Lord says,’ but I have not spoken . . . Because you have spoken nonsense and envisioned lies, therefore I am indeed against you” (Ezek. 13:3-8). “‘I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran. I have not spoken to them yet they prophesied’ . . . ‘Behold I am against the prophets,’ says the Lord, ‘who use their tongues and say, ‘He says.’ ‘Behold I am against those who prophesy false dreams,’ says the Lord, ‘and tell them, and cause My people to err by their lies and recklessness. Yet I did not send them or command them’” (Jer. 23:21, 31-32). “But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak . . . that prophet shall die” (Deut. 18:20).

**Apostle Ron said God will curse me.** Just an hour after our study, Mike received a call from his co-worker. He said God told apostle Ron that I would receive my sign. “What sign will it be?” Mike asked. “Something so horrible,” his co-worker answered, “I can’t even say.” How can I know if God has really spoken to him? God explains, “And if you say in your heart, ‘How shall we know the word which the Lord has not spoken?’ — when a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him” (Deut. 18:21-22).

I have no need to fear apostle Ron. He could not specifically identify what bad thing would happen to me because he is not a true prophet, and because God has not spoken to him. Anyone can say something bad will happen. Some-

thing bad will happen to each of us in the future (Eccl. 9:11-12). Just saying that does not make one a prophet.

A true prophet can precisely identify the future, like Isaiah specifically named Cyrus as the deliverer of Judah 150 years in advance (Isa. 45:1); or like Elijah foretold of Ahab’s death and the very spot where dogs would lick up his blood (1 Kings 21:19; 22:38); or like Micah identified Bethlehem as the very birthplace of Christ (Mic. 5:2). Apostle Ron is not like the prophets I read about in the Bible.

**Apostle Ron said he left the church of Christ.** Ron told us that he grew up in the church of Christ for 18 years. No faithful apostle would ever choose to leave the church of “or belonging to” Christ. New Testament apostles were foundational members (Eph. 2:20) of the one body of Christ, which is his one true church (Eph. 4:4; 1:22-23), which he shed his blood to purchase (Acts 20:28) and build (Matt. 16:18); the church of Christ (Rom. 16:16).

### Application

One of the most destructive acts of the devil today is to spread lies about the Holy Spirit. Since “the power of God to salvation” is in the gospel (Rom. 1:16), Satan must divorce us away from the gospel. He wants us to minimize and abuse it, and place our opinions and “*electric*” feelings above it. How can the great deceiver convince the religious world to abandon the Scriptures? Persuade them that the Holy Spirit is personally talking to them, and deceive them into thinking they are right, not because of what they read in the Bible, but because of what they feel in their heart. The result is denominational error and massive apostasy.

Jehovah’s Witnesses think they are led by the Holy Spirit but they teach something completely different from the Mormons, who think they also are led by the very same Spirit. Then we have the Baptists, the Pentecostals, apostle Ron, and so on. Each feel they have the Spirit, but there is no way that the “one and same Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:13) is leading them all into different and opposing doctrines.

Anyone can pretend or even convince themselves that God is talking to them, or that the Spirit is leading them this way and that, apart from his word. “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death” (Prov. 14: 12). Satan works, “with all power, signs and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish because they did not receive the love of the truth” (2 Thess. 2:9f). God allows souls to believe “a strong delusion” and be deceived by “lying wonders” because they refuse to listen to the truth found in his word. They would rather listen to their feelings instead (2 Tim. 4:3-4).

Maybe one day you too will run into an “apostle” of your own. If you do, remember the warning of the Holy Spirit

## “Christians Persecuted In China”

I received an e-mail from a brother on May 17 which detailed some persecution some brethren experienced while

in China. He said that while some US brethren and ten Chinese met in a hotel room for Bible study, the Chinese police raided their hotel room, confiscating cameras and film, individually interrogating each person (with threats and intimidation). They released the Americans to Hong Kong and canceled their visas as of May 13. The Americans are safe at home, but the actions taken against the Chinese Christians are yet to be known. In the e-mail, it was stated, “Young girls of 19 or 20 years old who have been Christians for only two weeks to a year, confessed their faith before the authorities and have written to tell me not to worry, for it is ‘only a small test.’ They showed more concern for us than for themselves.” Prayers on behalf of those Chinese Christians, and on behalf of those still going to China to preach the gospel to these people are requested at this time. What can we learn from this horrible occasion?

**1. The persecution of Christians is not an extinct practice.** I think sometimes we read various Bible passages concerning persecution, and think, “That’ll never happen.” Not true, it happens! Paul said, “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12). To the Romans, Paul said, “The Spirit itself beareth 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,

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himself who says, “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” (1 John 4:1).

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that we may be also glorified together” (Rom. 8:16-17). Peter said, “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy” (1 Pet. 4:12-13).

These passages not only applied to people in the first century. We see that these things still happen today. Why? Because the world hates those who are of Christ (John 15:18-20). Never forget this. If all men are speaking well of you, Christ says, “woe unto you”! (Luke 6:26). Maybe you’re not living as Christ wants you to live if the world is loving you! Persecution can take various forms, but nevertheless, it will come to those who are Christ’s.

**2. We need to stay strong in the Lord, for we do not know when such things may happen here.** Brethren, if we in the US think we are immune to such actions as are being experienced in China, as well as other foreign lands, we need to think again. We have been blessed by God to live in this wonderful country, but we are not guaranteed perpetual freedom to worship God. All it would take is for our government leaders to become physically hostile toward the truth, and we would experience a persecution such as other Christians are facing in their countries.

The Bible tell us, “Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth” (Prov. 27:1). How strong is your faith? It may one day be tested in the fires of persecution like the Chinese and other brethren are experiencing now in their respective countries.

**3. Serving God is more important than our life.** One quote I took from the e-mail letter was that of the young Chinese girls who confessed their faith before the authorities and then wrote to say not to worry about them. They said it is “only a small test.” These are the words of young Christians, 19-20 years old! We don’t know what they may have had to face by the Chinese police by way of intimidation, threats, and what punishment may have been carried out; but could *we* have said it is “only a small test” in the face of such persecution? Those words remind me of Paul

## Doing it the Ezra Way

Ezra set a fine example for those of us who teach. Ezra was an Old Testament scribe (Ezra 7:6). We would do well to take a look at his way of doing things. The Bible says, “For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments” (Ezra 7:10).

**1. Ezra Prepared His Heart:** The Bible heart is the mind that God searches and knows (1 Chron. 28:9). Heart preparation is important. “For as he thinketh in his heart so is he” (Prov. 23:7). It is “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh” (Matt. 12:34). Reading the parable of the sower will reveal the importance of heart preparation (Luke 8:4-18). If you plan to teach, prepare your heart!

**2. Ezra Was A Law Seeker:** We, like Ezra, must have a desire to learn the will of God. The Psalmist penned, “The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple” (Ps. 19:7). Determining to know the law of the Lord is a good law seeking sign. Jesus stated, “And ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). Good teachers seek their hearts to learn the law of the Lord.

**3. Ezra Did It:** It is not enough to know the law of

the Lord, we must do it! Much emphasis is placed, in the Word of God, on doing. Jesus said, “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 7:21). The wise “heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them,” while the foolish “doeth them not” (Matt. 7:24, 26). What are you building on?

**4. Ezra Taught Others:** Ezra was not content to know and obey the truth but he was determined to teach what he learned to others. We have been taught to teach also. “And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also” (2 Tim. 2:2). The Hebrew writer put it this way: “For when for the time ye ought to be teachers” (Heb. 5:12). Are you teaching others?

Now, be impressed with the Ezra Way order: Prepare the heart, seek the law of the Lord, do it, and then teach others. A reading of Acts 1:1 will show that Jesus followed this same procedure!

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when he said, “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Cor. 4:17).

The incident in China shows us that we truly are “strangers and pilgrims” in this world (1 Pet 2:11). The New Testament stresses time and again that though we are in this world, we are not of this world. Have we forgotten this fact? If we think that the child of God and the child of the devil can peacefully coexist, we need to think again! It has not been possible since Genesis, and it is not possible today! Amos asked, “Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” (Amos 3:3).

### Conclusion

Let us take this incident to heart, and realize that our lives can be endangered for the cause of Christ. When that occasion arrives, what will we do? Some may face this question sooner than others, so let us be as Daniel and “purpose in our heart” what we will do now before the time comes!

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# Archaeology and the Bible

1 Corinthians 11:2-16

Mike Willis

A study of ancient near east texts has elucidated many Bible passages. The

following is quoted from section 40 of “The Middle Assyrian Laws” found on clay tablets in ancient Ashur. The tablets were found during excavations at that site from 1903 to 1914. The tables themselves date from the time of Tiglath-pileser I in the 12<sup>th</sup> century B.C., but the laws on them may go back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century. This quotation is taken from *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, edited by James B. Pritchard (p. 183). I am reproducing it side by side with 1 Corinthians 11:1-16 without additional comment because of the background information it provides that shows the customs of people in that time.

40. Neither wives of seigniors nor [widows] nor [Assyrian women] who go out on the street [may] have their heads [uncovered]. The daughters of a seignor! . . . whether it is a shawl or a robe or [a mantle], must veil themselves; [they must not have] their heads (uncovered). Whether . . . or . . . or . . . they must [not veil themselves, but] when they go out on the street alone, they must veil themselves. A concubine who goes out on the street with her mistress must veil herself. A sacred prostitute whom a man married must veil herself on the street, but one whom a man did not marry must have her head uncovered on the street — she must not veil herself. A harlot must not veil herself; her head must be uncovered; he who has seen a harlot veiled must arrest her, produce witnesses, (and) bring her to the palace tribunal; they shall not take her jewelry away, (but) the one who arrested her may take her clothing; they shall flog her fifty (times) with staves (and) pour pitch on her head. However, if a seignor has seen a harlot veiled and has let (her) go without bringing her to the palace tribunal, they shall flog that seignor fifty (times) with staves; his prosecutor shall take his clothing; they shall pierce his ears, thread (them) with a cord, (and) tie (it) at his back, (and) he shall do the work of the king for one full month. Female slaves must not veil themselves and he who has seen a female slave veiled must arrest her (and) bring her to the palace tribunal; they shall cut off her ears (and) the one who arrested her shall take her clothes. If a seignor has seen a female slave veiled and has let her go without arresting her (and) bringing her to the palace tribunal, when they have prosecuted him (and) convicted him, they shall flog him fifty (times) with staves; they shall pierce his ears, thread (them) with a cord, (and) tie (it) at his back; his prosecutor shall take his clothes (and) he shall do the work of the king for one full month.

and maintain the traditions just as I handed them on to you. But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the husband is the head of his wife, and God is the head of Christ. Any man who prays or prophesies with something on his head disgraces his head, but any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled disgraces her head—it is one and the same thing as having her head shaved. For if a woman will not veil herself, then she should cut off her hair; but if it is disgraceful for a woman to have her hair cut off or to be shaved, she should wear a veil. For a man ought not to have his head veiled, since he is the image and reflection of God; but woman is the reflection of man. Indeed, man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for the sake of woman, but woman for the sake of man. For this reason a woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man or man independent of woman. For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman; but all things come from God. Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head unveiled? Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair, it is degrading to him, but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering. But if anyone is disposed to be contentious—we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God (1 Cor 11:16).

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## 1 Corinthians 11:2-16

I commend you because you remember me in everything



Marc Smith

## You're Too "Judgmental!"

A troubling experience that is becoming very common for preachers is the charge that we are too judgmental.

I have been literally amazed when after I have preached a lesson on a "first principles" subject like baptism, for instance, when specifics are completely necessary for one to be saved, to hear later from a critic that I was "maybe a little too negative." Then, when I ask my critic what was so negative about my tone, attitude, or lesson I have been told more than a couple of times that I was "just too judgmental." Such individuals might go on to say, "Can't you preach on baptism without necessarily condemning others?" Without perverting God's word here, there is simply no way to do that since any reasoning human being knows that Mark 16:16 says, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned." Let me quickly go over this so all will be together on how this charge of judgmentalism comes about.

Clearly, there are two steps involved in the first phrase of this verse. The first step is that *first* one must believe. The second step is that after believing, *secondarily and contingent on the first*, one must be baptized. The two steps together produce the resulting salvation. The second phrase of the verse says that if one does not believe (which includes obedience to God's word, i.e. "*be baptized*") he will be condemned. This is just too clear to have it any other way.

Getting back to this "too judgmental" charge, please note; I was not told that I was rude, or uncaring, or wrong in what I preached. I was told I was "just too judgmental." Was it really me that was too judgmental or does the real problem lie with what the Scriptures say? In years past preachers have, for the most part, had the support of audiences made up primarily of believers. Their real problem has been from those who believed false doctrines.

How has this become so common an experience for me and that I am now hearing this from so many others about "judging"? It is a remarkable thing that members of the Lord's church, Christians, are increasingly telling gospel preachers across the whole country that they are "too judgmental." In fact, among many wayward members their overall assessment of the church of Christ is

that "you are all just too judgmental and I don't want to be a part of that." Have these become the arbiters of some kind of ultimate truth aside from the word of God to make such statements?

Has it ever crossed their minds that when they make such decrees as this, that they have made a *judgment* of the accused? They have themselves become judgmental! What hypocrites! To be consistent, they are automatically guilty by their own standards if they raise the charge of judgmentalism against another!

To set the record straight, we as Christians are commanded to make judgments. Of course, most who level the charge of judgmentalism against faithful preachers and teachers of the gospel only know one verse about judging: "Judge not, that you be not judged" (Matt. 7:1). They ignore the rest of that passage and especially verse five where the Lord commands us not to make hypocritical judgments. These same "one-shot-johnnys" fail to realize that John 7:24 commands the children of God to make godly judgments, "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment." Clearly, when we are armed with the "whole counsel of God" we are to make just and reasonable judgments. When we make these judgments we are to be pure minded and godly and not in any way hypocritical.

Somehow, many ignorant and misguided souls have gotten the idea (I'm being judgmental again!), mostly from our worldly society, that making *any* kind of judgment is somehow intolerant. Didn't you know it was a sin to be intolerant? (Okay, I'll admit it, I don't want to be intolerant either, but can you please give me book, chapter, and verse?)

We are bombarded everywhere today with concepts like "political correctness" in speech (which is really never truly correct because such terminology is by nature so vague) and "multi-culturalism" to reverse the centuries old melting-pot of America, already having the effect of further dividing people rather than attaining any perceived benefit. Psychologists for a generation have been telling us "I'm

Okay, You're Okay" and now we as a nation believe them. As a result the "lifestyles" of perverts are protected and the godly find themselves universally vilified and castigated; the ultimate victims of the Post-Modernist Age. Colossians 2:8, says, "Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ."

The popular philosophy of our age is to not put pressure on everyone to make absolute statements about anything. All issues are shades of gray and never either black or white. The way to convince others today that you are an enlightened and well educated person is to show them that you cannot make "knee-jerk decisions." Judgments of this type are the most telling sign of an unsophisticated and unenlightened person. Such persons are the lowest form of life and are universally shunned and considered absolutely "uncool." It is now more important than any other principle in the world, to be "cool." In fact I've gotten the idea that "cool people" prefer any homosexual, cross-dressing, tattoo-covered, purple-cockatoo-haired, every-appendage-possible-pierced, slack-jawed pervert in the world to care for their small children and puppy dogs anytime over those who believe in God and live by his word. What the sound Christian lacks today more than ever is the "coolness factor" because we are judgmental!

Because brethren are influenced by this cultural trend we have a "unity-in-diversity" crowd among our own brethren who have perverted the simple teaching of the apostle Paul in Romans 14 they try somehow to finally get license for their real goal of seeing to it that divorce can be for any reason and that both parties can remarry as many times as they wish no matter what Matthew 5:32 or 19:9 might say. The absoluteness of these two passages is simply too narrow for our "enlightened" brethren to teach any longer. They are bombarded just like faithful preachers are bombarded, by erring brethren who have irreparably "messed up" their lives. They ask preachers, "You mean, I am not going to be able to marry again? You are telling me that as a result of what the Bible says, the consequences of my committing adultery require me to live without a sexual partner for the rest of my life?" It is clear, that by these questions they seek permission to do what they want.

This is the kind of question that tests the mettle of "men of God" (1 Tim. 6:11). Every preacher will have to find out if he is a "man of God" at this point, or a man of the world. Those who decide they are men of the world need to get out of preaching today! The whole controversy over Romans 14 in the brotherhood currently is that many preachers have decided to be "one with the world" rather than one with God. They do not want to be seen in any way judgmental.

Another illustration of this worldly trend not to make spiritual judgments is the fact that suddenly, a whole lot of preachers cannot find a false teacher anywhere! We had no problem before naming false teachers. As an explanation for their blindness, these preachers will give the limp answer that a false teacher is only one who knowingly teaches false doctrine. According to such later day Bible revisionists, such a man must be a liar and a charlatan, to qualify for our naming him as a false teacher.

While I agree that such a person is certainly a false teacher, what about all the other false teachers out there? Whatever happened to common sense in our thinking? Is Billy Graham a false teacher? By the definition of our "enlightened" brethren he is not! Doesn't Billy Graham teach Baptist doctrine and "once saved, always saved," etc.? Yes he does, but by our too tolerant brethren's definition, Billy Graham is not a false teacher because he is honest in his motives. He may teach false doctrine but he is not a false teacher. *What's that?* Now wait just a minute! This is not difficult at all to understand. *If Billy Graham teaches false doctrine, he is teaching falsely, ergo, he is a false teacher.* So, those who follow the doctrine Billy Graham preaches will not go to heaven, but will go to hell because they have believed a false doctrine. Mark 7:7, says, "And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men."

Those who want to believe that we cannot name one a false teacher unless we believe he is lying, require us to know the heart of the man which only the Lord has the ability to know (Rom. 8:27: "Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is.") Since we have neither the right nor the ability to know the hearts of men, we cannot be the ones to determine false teachers based on knowing their hearts. We can only know they are false teachers by what they have taught. Is that too common sense an approach for the "enlightened" among us to work with?

"... there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction" (2 Pet. 2:1). Some may see this Scripture as pointing to false teachers who "*secretly bring in destructive heresies*" thereby showing their duplicitous nature, being liars. I agree that such are indeed false teachers. But do you realize that the very preachers of renown that have brought about this rush of influential men to make an erroneous defense of them, are well known to have taught their false doctrines privately (secretly) for decades, never in the pulpit, till recent times? Does not this qualify them as being sneaky, dishonest and essentially, liars? So, these very characters may yet qualify in *every way* as false teachers by even our timid, overly tolerant and non-judgmental brethren!

## “Not a Terrorist” continued from page 1

cowardice and compliance with faithless men prevailed.

False teachers are known today, as they were known in New Testament times, by what they teach. Does one’s teaching harmonize with the apostles’ doctrine (1 John 4:6; Acts 2:42)? Does his instruction and exhortation conform to “the faith” delivered to the saints (Jude 3)? Or, does his teaching deceive, draw away, and destroy souls (Rom. 16:17-18; Acts 20:29-30; 2 Tim. 2:16-18)?

Saying “I am not a theistic evolutionist” does not make it so. Does your teaching contradict the Biblical record of creation in Genesis 1? Does “day” really mean “day” to you (see Exod. 20:8-11; 31:13-17)? Do you say the days of Genesis 1 “cannot be literal” and that they “must be ages”? Do you say that the Big Bang theory is “the Bible believer’s friend”? Do you urge a redefinition of plain Bible language to make it compatible with current scientific theory? Do you make room in Genesis 1 for billions of years of uniformitarian change as an explanation for the physical earth, making man a recent addition to the earth rather than an inhabitant “from the beginning of the creation” as stated by Jesus in Mark 10:6? Do you deny that the physical earth and its inhabitants were caused to be in a fully mature form as “He spake, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast” (Ps. 33:9)? Do you claim it does not matter what we believe and teach on this subject (cf. Acts 17:24-31; Gal. 1:8-9)?

Saying “I am not a false teacher” does not make it so. For instance, do you teach doctrines which deny the universal authority of Christ on marriage, divorce and remarriage (such as alien sinners are not amenable to Christ’s teaching on marriage, divorce, and remarriage, Matt. 19:4-9; Heb. 13:4)? Do you affirm that the guilty fornicator who caused the sundering of a first marriage has the lawful right to marry another (Matt. 19:9)? Do you redefine “adultery”

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Brethren, the lost of this world need all Christians and particularly gospel preachers and elders to have spiritual backbones. If you love the souls of men and women in the world around you and do not want them eternally lost you must tell the truth of God’s word. Get up off your world-loving bellies and stand upright on the two legs God gave you. Raise up out of the mire of this deceitful world and do your duty before man and God. Be not fearful to make righteous judgments from the pages of God’s word and preach it straight! Now is the time to be like Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:2, “Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and teaching.” Be different from the world.  
address

to mean a legal act rather than a sexual sin in which one continues committing immorality with a sexual partner to whom there is no lawful right (John 8:4; Rev. 2:20-22)? Do you justify continuing with an unlawful spouse by saying there is no specific command to sever such relationships (cf. Acts 26:20)? Do you view these issues as “no big deal” (cf. 2 John 9)?

Saying, “I am not a compromiser of God’s word” does not make it so. Do you receive those who have gone beyond the doctrine of Christ on these or other matters of revealed truth (2 John 9-11)? Do you expand the borders of Romans 14 to include those engaged in sinful practices and those teaching doctrinal error? Do you appeal to “our historical tolerance” of some in error as justification for continued toleration of sin and error? Have you redefined “have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness” until the plain language has no application to present practitioners of error? (In truth, we can and are under commandment to “expose” the unfruitful works of darkness, Eph. 5:11.)

Zacarias Moussaoui says he is not a terrorist, but claiming not to be one does not make it so. The facts of his case will be presented and analyzed in a court of law, and a judgment will be rendered. If innocent, he will be released. If found guilty, all his pleadings to the contrary will not lessen the truth of the matter.

Similarly, claiming not to be in error does not make it so. A judgment of the facts, based upon the inspired word of God, is in order to determine “whether these things are so” (Acts 17:11; 1 Thess. 5:21; 1 John 4:1). The Lord expects us to “judge what is right,” and with his word we can do so (Luke 12:54-57). Does one’s teaching harmonize with apostolic doctrine (Gal. 1:6-9)? By following his teaching does one abide in the doctrine of Christ (2 John 9)? Such an analysis of what a teacher teaches (his fruit) can and should be made so that righteous judgment, once rendered, can be applied (John 7:24; 5:30; 1 Thess. 5:21-22). In this way we obey Christ’s warning to beware of false prophets, expose the unfruitful works of darkness, and abide in the doctrine of Christ (Matt. 7:15-20; Eph. 5:11; 2 John 9-11).

Should the evidence prove Moussaoui to be a terrorist, I suspect he will object to being called one. But, if the evidence bears it out, it will be a fair and accurate description of the man. Likewise, when the evidence of inspired Scripture shows one to be a false teacher, it is a fair, accurate and scriptural description regardless of the fervent denial which arises. It is our fervent prayer that what results from the exposure of error is humble repentance, not the agitated dismissal of scripturally-established facts.

Have I just charged some brethren with being terrorists? No, of course not. If that is the conclusion you draw then please, read this article again. You did not grasp the

intended point. If you hear the warning of the Lord that we are indeed false teachers when we teach things which are not supported by the word of God, then you got the point (Matt. 7:15-16; Acts 20:29-31; 1 Tim. 4:1-3; 2 Pet. 2:1-2; 1 John 4:1, 6). If you heed his warning by teaching and walking in truth, keeping his word in all things, then you got the point (1 John 2:3-6; 2 Tim. 4:2-4).

No Christian who desires to teach and walk in truth will object to his teachings and practices being righteously tested by the standard of divine truth (2 Cor. 13:5; 1 John 4:1; 2 Tim. 3:16-17). May each of us be willing to test ourselves and to be tested against the holy, final and absolute standard of the word of God. And may we be willing to correct every error that is exposed so that we may always do the will of the Father (Matt. 7:21). "Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you" (1 Tim. 4:16).

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## **"Esau" continued from page 2**

One of the earliest things said about him is that he sold his birthright for a mess of pottage (Gen. 25:29-34). The narrative reads as follows:

. . . and Esau came from the field, and he was faint: And Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage; for I am faint: therefore was his name called Edom. And Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birthright. And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me? And Jacob said, Swear to me this day; and he sware unto him: and he sold his birthright unto Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentiles; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way: thus Esau despised his birthright.

Later, Esau married Hittite wives named Judith and Bashemath (Gen. 26:34).

When Isaac's health declined, he wanted to confer the birthright blessing on Esau, whom he favored over Jacob. This was his intention in spite of the divine prophecy before the children were born which said, "Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger" (Gen. 25:23). Under the providence of God and through the deceit of Jacob and Rebekah, the birthright blessing was conferred on Jacob rather than Esau. As a result of this, Esau hated Jacob and threatened to kill his brother (Gen.

27:41-42). To keep Esau from killing Jacob, Rebekah manipulated Isaac to send Jacob to Haran in search of a wife from among their clan. When Esau perceived that his marriage to Hittite women displeased his parents, he married an Ishmaelite daughter hoping to better please his parents (Gen. 28:6-9).

Aside from his temporary hatred of his brother, there is no positive wickedness ascribed to Esau, such as murder, fornication, stealing, etc. In many respects, one appreciates him more than his conniving brother (Jacob later became a better person). What the Scriptures condemn Esau for is his lack of appreciation for that which is holy. This is the sense in which he is described as profane.

The writer of Hebrews said, "Lest there be any fornicator, or *profane person*, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright" (Heb. 12:16). Selling his birthright blessing was evidence of Esau's profanity. The birthright blessing is a precious thing. In Deuteronomy 21:15-17, the firstborn receives a double portion of the inheritance (for example: if there were three children, the inheritance was divided into four parts and the firstborn received two parts or one-half of the inheritance). The firstborn usually became the leader of the clan. In reference to the sons of Abraham, the inheritance related to the future promises to the sons of Abraham: (a) The land of promise; (b) The promise of a great nation descending from his loins; (c) The seed promise. Esau showed his disdain for these divine blessings when he sold them for a mess of pottage (25:32-33). Later, he despised his birthright (25:33).

### **There Are Profane Men Today**

Esau was not the only son of a man of faith who became profane. There are many profane descendants of Christians, just as Esau was the profane descendant of righteous Isaac.

**Children still squander their spiritual heritage.** Esau was an heir of a great spiritual heritage. His grandfather Abraham was the one who was called from Ur of the Chaldees to receive the great spiritual promises from the Lord. His father Isaac voluntarily allowed his father to tie him to the altar to be slain, in complete confidence that God would raise him from the dead. But this faith was not in the heart of Esau. He squandered his great spiritual heritage. Many children appreciate their spiritual heritage and walk in the footsteps of their faithful parents, like Isaac had done. Look at the heritage Eunice and Lois gave to Timothy and how precious it was to him (2 Tim. 1:5-6; 3:14). Many of us have been blessed with Christian parents who were devoted to the Lord. They took us to church where we heard the gospel. They gave us a good example. Many of us are devoted children of God because we appreciate the spiritual heritage, our birthright, that our parents gave to us. We treasure this blessing and are conscientiously trying



to pass it down to our children. Our spiritual heritage is all that some of our parents were able to leave us.

However, there are other children who are like Esau. These children have no appreciation for spiritual values and sell them for a mess of pottage. They make choices, not to become murderers, thieves, extortioners, adulterers, or homosexuals, but to leave God out of their lives. When they grow up, they become profane parents who are too busy running their children to ball practice, play practice, scouts, choral practice, and after-school, part-time work to have any time left to teach these children God's word and take them to church. Profane parents raise children who are computer wizards, star athletes, cheerleaders, and stars in the school plays and choral groups — but they are not Christians. And, if the profane parents care enough to come to church, their children obviously have little or no interest in worship services, Bible classes, and other spiritual matters. They come to worship without having prepared for Bible lessons, drag in late every service, and are bored while they are there. They are just there — there because their parents made them come. They are resolved, just as soon as they old enough to make their own decisions, not to go to church any more. And that is what they do. I have seen churches lose a whole generation of children in this manner. They are just like profane Esau.

**Christians throw away their spiritual blessings because of the attractions of this world.** The spiritual blessings in Christ are such a rich blessing (Eph. 1:3, 7; 2:7; 3:8; Phil. 4:19). Think of what they are: (a) Forgiveness of sins; (b) Present relationship with God and his children; (c) Hope of eternal life; (d) The best life possible on earth (1 Tim. 4:8). Profane men throw this away because they esteem it so lightly. These blessings are not as important to them as what they want today. A “mess of pottage” means more than great, rich spiritual blessings. Spiritual things are not as important to them as being with the socially accepted group at school, climbing the corporate ladder, achieving wealth, and such like things. When men give up their spiritual blessings in order to obtain such things, they are displaying the same spiritual traits as profane Esau. Jesus told us about the relative unimportance of such things when he said, “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?” (Matt. 16:26).

**Children display their profane ways in whom they choose to marry.** In this respect they are like profane Esau who thought marrying Hittites was nothing significant (26:34-35). The text of Genesis clearly intends for one to conclude that Esau demonstrated his unfitness to receive the seed promise in two ways: (a) how little he esteemed the birthright blessing and (b) whom he chose to marry. When Esau chose to marry these women who had no faith in God, he manifested his lack of spirituality — his profane

ways. We have no indication that Esau's wives were wicked women; they just did not have faith in God. Many of our young people have manifested the same profane ways when they marry people who have no interest in helping them to go to heaven when they die. As a result, these marriage relationships generally pull these young people further and further away from God.

**Churches squander their heritage.** Churches that have been established and defended through strong gospel preaching sometimes squander their spiritual heritage. They were salvaged from liberalism because courageous men sacrificed much to preserve the church from liberalism. These churches soon lose appreciation for the significance and uniqueness of gospel preaching (1 Pet. 4:11; 1 Cor. 4:6; 2 John 9-11). They want a more palatable gospel, one that does not offend visitors from the denominations by telling them that they must leave their denomination to become a Christian. They do not want clear preaching on moral issues because it might drive away some of their members who see nothing wrong with social drinking, buying lottery tickets, allowing their children to attend dances, or have an abortion. They do not want clear preaching on divorce and remarriage because it might drive away visitors. After a time, these churches become enamored with the megachurches of our day and are lured into denominationalism. Such churches have sacrificed their true great spiritual heritage for a mess of pottage.

#### **Esau Sold His Birthright For A Mess of Pottage**

The Nuzi tablets record instances of birthright blessings being sold, just as Esau sold his blessings. Usually those blessings were sold for something substantial. But Jacob bought Esau's birthright blessing for a bowl of bean soup (Gen. 25:34). Esau was looking at the moment — the temporary quenching of his hunger. There is no indication that he was starving to death; he was just hungry. To quench his immediate physical appetite, Esau gave up a very precious blessing.

How frequently men lose sight of the eternal matters because of their present wants and desires. Jesus was able to look beyond the momentary suffering for the more abiding and eternal inheritance (cf. Heb. 12:1-2); he was not like Esau. Paul looked beyond the present sufferings to the abiding inheritance (2 Cor. 4:16-17); he was not like Esau.

We look back at Esau's trade and think how foolish he was. But men are still making equally foolish decisions today. Men get so little in exchange for their souls — a few minutes of pleasure in fornication, a few years of popularity in high school, a few years of fishing and boating, a few years to enjoy riches, a few years with a marriage companion, etc. These are but messes of pottage — bean soup, when compared to the soul. Esau was not the only one to purchase “Bean Soup for the Soul!”

### Esau Was A Grief to His Parents (26:35)

Profane children cause grief to their godly parents. As I travel from congregation to congregation in holding meetings, I have frequently sat at the dinner table when the conversation turns to a discussion of one's children. The parents may tell me with a sense of pride about their children's secular accomplishments in the business world, educational achievements, and humanitarian awards. But, I have seen tears well up in the eyes of older saints when they are asked, "Are your children faithful to the Lord?" The pain that these parents feel from witnessing the profane attitudes in their children who have walked away from faith in God is manifest even after many years. Like Isaac and Rebekah who were grieved over Esau, these parents grieve their children's apostasy from God.

I have been around other parents who do not appear to be grieved by their children's apostasy from Christ. Their hearts are not broken by children who are living without hope of eternal life. These children perceived that eternal life really was not all that important to their parents and decided not to go through the same pretense that their parents did. Perhaps I am not overstating the case to say that profane parents are not grieved by profane children.

### Esau Despised His Birthright

One significant statement is made about Esau after his sold his birthright for a bowl of bean soup. The text says that "Esau despised his birthright" (Gen. 25:34). The sense is that Esau regretted what he gave up for his bean soup and, to cope with it, he despised his birthright. There will come a time when those who gave up eternal life for whatever they receive in exchange for their soul will come to despise that exchange in the same way that Esau did. They may hate their job which they sacrificed their children's best spiritual interests to obtain; they may hate those peers whom they so wanted to impress that they compromised their values. Whatever the situation, one will eventually regret the decision he made, just as Esau did.

### Conclusion

Men who make decisions that leave God out of their lives are "profane" men. They may not be immoral, but they have no appreciation for the spiritual things of life. They are "unspiritual," carnal people (1 Cor. 3:3-3; Gal. 5:15-16). Do we have any Esau's among us?

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## Field Reports



### New Congregation

After much study and prayer, a group of faithful brethren have started a sound work in Rosenberg, Texas. The need for a sound congregation to meet in the area was made a necessity on February 11, 2001. We are Christians who desire heaven as our home and are willing to stand where our Lord stands in all aspects of his word. We encourage Bible discussions and study to have a ready answer for the hope that is within us. We began meeting in the home of one of the members. Then, a local denomination offered the use of their building while in the process of selling the property. We have since permanently located in a building on the corner of Avenue O and 7th Street. We had an excellent meeting with Jesse Flowers from the Pruett & Lobit congregation in Baytown with many visiting from the area churches. We had a meeting in January with Jerry Fite from the Parkview congregation in Pasadena.

Anyone needing directions, please call Ken Martin, 281-232-2974 or e-mail: [kdbfmartin@nstci.com](mailto:kdbfmartin@nstci.com). Our services are scheduled on Sunday morning: 9:00 Bible study, 10:00 Worship. Sunday evening: 5:30 Training Class, 6:00 Worship. Wednesday: 7:00 Bible Study. We would welcome visitors. [Ken.Vaughn@ev1.net](mailto:Ken.Vaughn@ev1.net).

## Quips & Quotes



### Justices Decline to Review Graduation Prayer Case

"Washington — The Supreme Court backed away Monday from a confrontation over student-led prayers at high school graduations, an action that all sides in the church-state fight say increases pressure for a stronger religious presence at public school ceremonies.

"The court did not comment in turning down an appeal from a high school student near Jacksonville, Fla. who objected to the school's policy of letting the senior class pick a classmate to deliver a graduation message.

"The chosen student is often the class chaplain, an elected office like president or treasurer. Although the messages need not be religious, religion was the theme of all but four addresses delivered over three years at 17 public high schools in Duval County, Fla.

"The school argued that students, not teachers or administrators, make all the decisions about whether there will be an address, who will give it and whether it will be religious.

"The Supreme Court's action Monday was not a decision on the merits of the policy but will be read as a signal that other schools can avoid constitutional problems if they install the same policy, lawyers said.

"The fact that the Supreme Court refused to review the case sends a green light to other school districts that they can produce a neutral policy," said Matthew Staver, president and general counsel of Liberty Counsel, a religious civil liberties and legal defense organization. The group intervened on behalf of students who wanted religious addresses" (The Indianapolis Star [December 11, 2001], A7).

#### "Birds of a Feather"

"Some of our liberal brethren in Athens (on their way to total apostasy) joined with sectarians (First Christian, Catholics, Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, Episcopal) in a Thanksgiving celebration. Guess who baked the turkeys. Central church of Christ. That's what the newspaper report said. If Jesus Christ died to establish an institution to bake turkeys, serve banquets and play in gymnasiums, I have been reading the wrong book. My New Testament says nothing about such activities. It does tell Christians to "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them" (Eph. 5:11). But of course the problem with such brethren is that they don't believe those sectarians are in darkness. They now contend that all "believers" are saved Christians. Liberalism is a package deal — accept part of it and you will eventually accept all of it. That's what history and the Bible confirm. Turn back before it's too late!" Eugene Britnell (The Sower [January/February 2002], 7).

#### Movement on the Abortion Issue

The January 2002 issue of Ensign contained an article entitled "Is Abortion Murder?" by Olan Hicks. Brother Hicks wrote,

Personally, I am very glad that when the egg was fertilized that later produced me, it was not aborted before I was fully assembled, at any point along the way. Of course, we all feel that way. Whether it would technically have been murder is not as important to me as the fact that I want to live. Even if it would not have been murder to abort me, from where I sit it certainly looks like it would have been wrong. Now, if my fetus was so deformed that being born would mean a life of misery and total uselessness, then I probably would see it differently (my emphasis, mw).

In his conclusion, brother Hicks wrote, "My point is that anytime we abort a pregnancy we are aborting a life in the potential sense. That alone does not make it wrong. It depends on the circumstance" (19).

Our brother contends that abortion is not a sin in certain circumstances (situation ethics). Should we oppose his doctrine or are we ready for the same plea of fellowship in doctrinal diversity on the subject of abortion as some are wanting on the subject of divorce and remarriage? Is the only one to be condemned the man who stands up and calls for adherence

to what the Bible teaches on abortion, as has been the case for those who called for adherence to the word of God on divorce and remarriage? We will see what we will see.

#### Elmer Moore Publishes Book on the Holy Spirit

Brother Elmer Moore has published a 137-page book entitled Lessons on the Holy Spirit. This document is the compilation of a series of lessons on the Holy Spirit by Elmer Moore. Brother Moore has preached on this subject for many years. He has continually improved and modified his notes. The modifications came as a result of questions that were asked by brethren in many different places where he preached these series of lessons, both at his home congregations and in gospel meetings. The questions that were asked prompted Elmer to include material that would cover the information indicative of these questions. These lessons were recorded on tapes which have been transcribed. This document is the result of those transcribed lessons. In addition to the lessons per se, Elmer's charts, from which he preached these lessons, have been incorporated in the text. These charts are adequate, in themselves, to preach the sermons on the five different categories of lessons on the Holy Spirit:

1. Chapter One: Basic Truths About The Holy Spirit (Charts 1-13).
2. Chapter Two: The Baptism of The Holy Spirit (Charts 14-22).
3. Chapter Three: The Inspiration of The Holy Spirit (Charts 23-31).
4. Chapter Four: Miracles, Signs & Wonders of The Holy Spirit (Charts 32-48).
5. Chapter Five: Gifts of The Holy Spirit and Indwelling of The Spirit (Charts 49-64).

The book retails for \$6.75 and is available through our bookstore. Call 1-800-428-0121

## Original Commentary on Acts

by J.W. McGarvey

Written 1861-63, McGarvey's study approaches Acts as an account of cases of conversion to Christ. The book is devastating against many denominational ideas and stresses the scripturalness of such restoration concepts as apostolic example. #80012.

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