

## Miscellaneous Beliefs

- x Eve sinned before she ate from the tree.
- x You should do everything you can to live as long as possible.
- x Hair, Hats, Clothes, and Tattoos
- x You should forgive, no matter what.
- x Mankind will live on other planets someday.
- x We must obey the government, even when its evil.
- x Praying for the lost is a waste of time.
- x Adolph Hitler could have been saved if he had asked Jesus into his heart just before he died.
- x Teachers will be judged under a stricter standard for how they taught the Bible.
- x Priests and nuns can't get married.
- x You're judging me; Jesus said "Thou shalt not judge."
- x It doesn't matter what one believes, just as long as you treat people right.
- x A person shouldn't take narcotic-based prescription medication.
- x You need a college degree to be a preacher.
- x I'm basically a good person.
- x We can't help sinning—even after becoming a Christian!
- x Christians must be involved in politics and vote regularly.
- x Material prosperity is proof of God's blessing in your life.
- x The Roman Empire slaughtered millions of Christians.
- x Christianity is too judgmental against other religions.
- x "The Lord spoke to me..."
- x Christians must not be cremated!
- x Throw nothing away and eat everything on your plate.
- x The ground is cursed.

## Eve Sinned Even Before She Ate The Fruit

I don't know what causes men to minimize, discount, or otherwise give women a bum rap. In some ways, they're no different than the ilk of the Middle Eastern religions. Concerning Eve, they like to go after her for “adding” to God's word:

The woman said to the serpent, “From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat from it **or touch it**, (emphasis mine) or you will die.’” (Gen 3:2-3)

God's original instruction to Adam said nothing about touching the forbidden fruit. So preachers claim that Eve added to the Word of God by introducing the "no-touch" clause. In other words, she sinned *before* the so-called Original Sin was committed.

Our first parents communed with God. The Lord apparently "walked in the Garden" regularly. (Gen. 3:8) Is it too much to assume that Adam and Eve had conversations with God to clarify the issue of the tree? Not to mention how to have kids? Or how to care for the garden? To discuss humanity's purpose? It's ridiculous to assume that God never spoke to them of anything except what's written in scripture.

The Gospels contain differences between one writer's account and another. If we're going to be fair, we need to accuse the apostles of "adding" to God's word. And there are other places in scripture where the same statements are different when repeated in other books. Paul quoted the Septuagint, but he usually paraphrased it. So the assumption of Eve lying or being culpable is a rather weak one. But since it has been taught this way, it has become the "gospel truth."

When God told Adam not to eat of the fruit, he used the nominative singular:

The LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You (singular) may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you (singular) shall not eat, for in the day that you (singular) eat of it you (singular) shall surely die.” (Gen 2:16-17)

So God is speaking to one person—Adam. Then, when Eve is referencing this same commandment, she switches to the nominative plural, meaning that it was spoken to Adam *and* herself:

The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, 'You (plural) shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you (plural) touch it, lest you (plural) die.’” (Gen 3:1-3)

Eve is admitting that God spoke to both of them. But “scholars” want to assume that God never spoke to Eve; that it was Adam who relayed the commandment to his wife.

If you want to get right down to the nitty-gritty, not touching that fruit was plain good advice.

Were not Adam and Eve going to have children? Of course, they were! Can't you see her telling the kids, “See that tree over there? Don't eat that fruit. Don't touch it. Don't go near it.” Not everything that happened or was said in the Garden is recorded, and to slap Eve with the sin of adding to God's Word is patently ridiculous.

It's bad enough that Adam and Eve did what they did; let's not add to the guilt with our bogus interpretations.

## **You Should Do Everything You Can To Live As Long As Possible**

Let's face it: those who decide to undergo a medical procedure to extend their time on earth do so out of concern for a loved one or their family. I've heard, "If I die before my spouse, he/she won't be able to care for themselves." Or it's for the kids' sake.

I've been told that it was my "duty" to get a certain surgery so that the extra time could be spent on the kingdom. Should we get open-heart surgery to extend our time on Earth? What about kidney dialysis? What if you need insulin to survive, as I do? Believe it or not, some believe that you should do everything in your power to live as long as possible. Not doing so, in their estimation, could be a sin. Easy to say when you're not the one taking out a second mortgage to help cover medical costs that may or may not work!

The heart-lung machine did not appear until 1953. Are we to assume that since the means and methods exist, we must now embrace them to delay the inevitable? Let's face it: some folks are just plain frightened of death. While they sing *When We All Get To Heaven* and confess to knowing they have eternal security in Christ, they are terrified of crossing the Great Divide. Dr. J Vernon McGee, a famous radio preacher, once said on the air, "I'm terrified of dying! I want to live as long as I can!"

I know of one elderly couple where the wife went in for cardiac bypass surgery. Since her husband needed the same surgery, he had an epiphany: she would out-live him, placing herself in danger of trying to live alone. So he decided to sign up for the same surgery. The wife lived a lot longer, but spent most of her last months in abject misery, praying to God to take her. He eventually did. The husband sat alone, waiting another two years in quiet desperation for release.

I had another good friend who had open-heart surgery. His life fell into a regimen of taking 30 different medications per day, avoiding the foods he enjoyed, not to mention adding months of misery having to live with a cantankerous wife. On his final trip to the emergency room, he refused to allow the doctors to do anything that would keep him alive. I smile in the memory, where I served him up a plate of BBQ ribs. His wife was nagging at him for eating them. It was his last meal, and he passed into heaven with a smile.

There is no right or wrong answer. These decisions are very personal and must be made with much prayer and discussion. The problem I have is with folks who claim you are sinning for not doing XYZ to live longer. The reason that the extra time will allow you

to convert more folks to Christ. This is nonsense. It's like the guy who thinks the company he's working for will go out of business when he retires. He doesn't realize that 2 weeks after he's gone no one will remember his name and the company will prosper.

My wife is 32 years younger than I. We have a 14-year-old daughter at the time of this writing. I face the real possibility of getting some kind of major operation to extend my life, simply to provide for my much younger family. But what if I opt out of it? Do I know what God has planned for those I leave behind? Abraham and Sarah thought they were carrying out God's will by enlisting Hagar's help. But God had other plans.

I tell my wife and daughter on occasion not to get mad at Jesus for taking me to heaven; He will have a reason.

Whatever you decided to do regarding your health and welfare is your business. Just don't try and levy some misguided morality against others for choosing to let life take its course.

Embracing medical technology to spread the Gospel to a few more folks is well and good. It can also be rather assumptive, especially when most folks goof off the majority of their time chasing Life. King Hezekiah cried like a baby because his death was foretold to him. God granted him another 15 years and fathered one of Israel's worst kings, Manasseh. (Isaiah 38) When Isaiah told Hezekiah that he had acted foolishly with the Babylonians, his response was, "It won't affect me—I'll be dead!" (Isa 39:8)

We are given a certain amount of time by the Lord, which He expects us to manage wisely. We're not going to face the Lord's wrath on Judgment Day for blowing off open-heart surgery. He will, however, scrutinize how well we've done with our talents. (Matt 25:14ff)

## Hair, Hats, Clothes, and Tattoos

The hair problem comes from misinterpreting 1 Corinthians 11:

Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair it is a disgrace for him, but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering. (1 Cor 11:14 – 15)

There is more to the context, but this is the essence of the issue. When teenage boys started growing long hair in the 1960s, this verse was shouted from pulpits all over the nation. I was in my teens at the time and lemme tell you, it got downright hostile. Walk by a construction site, and you were guaranteed to be called "pansy," "faggot," or worse.

Corinth was a 1<sup>st</sup> Century Sin City. It was the hub of trade, where East met West and North met South. It was very prosperous and very immoral. One of the main trades was prostitution. Female prostitutes were identified by their short hair. This is why Paul wrote, "since it is disgraceful for a wife to cut off her hair or shave her head, let her cover her head." (1 Cor 11:16) What was the disgrace to which Paul was referring? It was borne out of what the local prostitutes did. It was their call sign. In Rome, if a wife was caught in adultery, part of her punishment was to have her hair hacked off. The message was, if you want to act the whore, then look like one. (Nothing happened to the men who partook of the sin.)

There were also male prostitutes in Corinth. Want to guess what their call sign was? Long hair! When Paul asks, "Doesn't even nature itself teach you that long hair on a man is a disgrace?" he is not referring to the animal kingdom. Neither is he talking about God's nature since God directed long hair on a man who took a Nazarite vow. (Judges 13:5) The only time Samson fell out of favor with God was when he lost his long hair. (Judge 16:19, 20) The *nature* to which the apostle was referring was *culture*. Normal men wore short hair while male prostitutes wore it long. Normal women wore long hair; prostitutes did the opposite. They were *contrary* to what was considered the norm, or what was natural in society.

Many feel they are displeasing God by not following "commands" such as wearing a hat in the worship service. It is the old Galatian sin of putting another gospel next to Christ's gospel, namely, that His blood saves us but we have to abide by certain laws to keep that salvation.

Today, no one cares about men wearing long hair. Walk into any church and most women are not wearing hats and who also (GASP!) wear blue jeans. God looks upon the heart, and fine clothes can hide the darkest secrets.

I've been in churches that made it mandatory for women to wear dresses, even when doing outside work in the churchyard. Yet Peter was clear:

Your adornment must not be merely external—braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses... (1 Pet 3:3) NASB

Now, if we're going to nit-pick, the apostle said, “no dresses” for the woman. Does that mean they have to wear pants? Do you see how foolish we can become?

Lastly, the Bible does not forbid tattoos. In ancient times, however, tattoos served as marks for false gods:

You shall not make any cuts on your body [in mourning] for the dead, nor make any tattoo marks on yourselves; I am the Lord. (Lev 19:28)

In another passage, tattoos were an acceptable means of proclaiming faith in God:

“This one will say, ‘I am the LORD's,’ another will call on the name of Jacob, and another will write on his hand, ‘The LORD's,’ and name himself by the name of Israel.” (Isa 44:5)

So the practice is not an issue with God today, as long as what you put on your skin is not immoral or demonic. God looks at the heart. Your body may be covered in ink, but it will dissolve into the grave along with the rest of humanity.

## **You Should Forgive, No Matter What**

I watched a newscast of a tragic church shooting, where several members were murdered in a Sunday morning Bible study. A woman from that church told the camera that they had already forgiven the killer, declaring that it was the Christian thing to do. Too many Christians are quick to adopt a turn-the-other-cheek mentality and cry out “we forgive them!” I wonder how the apostle Paul would have responded?

Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. (2 Tim 4:14)

Do you detect forgiveness in Paul's statement? Just the opposite; he was hurting from whatever Alexander had done to him, and he promised God's vengeance on the man.

Believe it or not, there are conditions for forgiving someone.

“Pay attention to yourselves! *If* your brother sins, rebuke him, and *if* he repents, forgive him, and *if* he sins against you seven times in the day, and turns to you seven times, saying, 'I repent,' you must forgive him.” (Luke 17:3-4) ESV

There are conditions for forgiveness; it isn't dispensed out-of-hand. There is (1) the sin or offense committed; (2) repentance on the offender's part; (3) forgiveness on your part. Forgiveness is also an extension of God's grace to us as we extend it toward others. In other words, the Lord put up with a lot of nonsense from me; why should I not extend the same courtesy to my fellows? This is taught in Matthew 18:23ff.

Another aspect of forgiveness involves forgotten or ignorant offenses that you may not be aware of.

Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. (Mark 11:25)

Forgiveness is not a prescription where magic words are said and things are instantly restored. Ask someone who has had a cheating spouse. The hurt runs deep and forgiveness does not come so easily. This is especially true if divorce has been the result and the cheater has started a new life and family, never once begging for forgiveness.

We are not doormats. Men should be quick to protect their family and worry about the forgiving at an appropriate time.



## Mankind Will Live On Other Planets Someday

The notion of inter-space exploration and extension of humanity to the stars has been around since the days of famed sci-fi writer H.G. Wells. It all makes for good movies and books but doesn't have any biblical support. Note what God told Adam & Eve:

“Be fruitful and multiply and fill the *earth* and subdue *it*, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the *earth*.” (Genesis 1:28)

God didn't tell them to subdue the galaxy or the whole of creation. There's no authority for us to subdue and dominate any alien creatures. The clear command is to multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it and the creatures that inhabit it. Period. To claim that someday mankind will multiply, fill the galaxy, and dominate it is not part of God's plan.

God made one race, the human race. There are no alien worlds out there, plotting to send faster-than-light ships to earth to dominate, rule, make us better, etc. If so, Christ would have had to be born on other planets and do the whole die-on-a-cross nightmare over and over again.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps the biggest factor against space exploration is the lack of sustainability. The current goal of colonizing Mars is fraught with danger. No breathable atmosphere, no ores, not a lick of wood, stone, or other useful resources. Everything would have to be brought from earth, a two year wait for the FedEx guy to deliver.

There has also been zero discovery of an inhabitable planet, based on spectroscopic analysis of everything out there. And even if there were, how would we get there? The notion of reaching light speed was pooh-poohed by Einstein decades ago—it's not possible. Google it to find out more. Wormholes and folding space are all theory, based on science fiction, not fact.

In his book, *The Devil's Delusion*, David Berlinski (an atheist physicist) studied the mathematics used by his peers to "prove" their theories on multiple universes and other astronomic ideas. He found that most of it were absolute nonsense. They never figured on someone like Berlinski—one of their own—to expose their bogus formulae.

My friend, you will be long dead before humanity strikes out for the stars. Why don't you trust God's Word for what it says and get yourself right with Jesus? Once you've

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<sup>1</sup> Some may disagree, asserting that just because humanity sinned it doesn't mean races on other planets did also. Simple mathematics proves otherwise, however. *Someone* is going to reach for the forbidden fruit. If Adam & Eve hadn't done it, one of their progeny would have.

gotten eternal life and you're living with God, you can then ponder the distant galaxies, if they still exist.

## **We Must Obey The Government, Even If It's Evil**

During the apostle Paul's life, Rome was a corrupt and evil empire. One only has to read secular history to see how bad it was. Does Paul write in any of his letters for Christians to take up protest signs and try to change the Roman government? Never. We are not here to change the world, only the hearts of men and women. If at all possible, be at peace with all. (Heb 12:14; cf Rom 14:19)

First off, let's present the verse in question:

Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves. (Rom 13:1-2) NASU

It's completely bogus to suggest that God would only allow “good people” to control our governments. While the concept may be nice, it's not based in reality. Satan is called the Prince of this world. (John 16:11—KJV) So how does one treat the text in Romans 13, that says we must obey the government?

Firstly, it says, “there is no authority except from God.” The Greek meaning of *authority* is *all privilege, force, capacity, competency, freedom, or delegated influence has its origin in God*. Just as life finds its origin from the Creator, so too do all forms of authority. The Law comes from Him. Even the universe functions within a set of laws. Without such authority, all would be in chaos.

When a government or king rules, however badly, the structure of that control is based on the parameters God intended. The problem is sin. Because sin rules in the hearts of most men, evil is prevalent and terrible decisions are made.

We tend to view things through a microscope, whereas God sees the whole picture. Just because an evil man rules now doesn't make the Lord culpable in that person's sin. Note:

The LORD was not willing to destroy the house of David, because of the covenant that he had made with David, and since he had promised to give a lamp to him and to his sons forever. (2Ch 21:7)

What had happened was this:

1. God had promised David that he would never lack for a man on the throne. (2 Sam 7:16)

2. God qualified the promise later: “If your sons pay close attention to their way, to walk before me in faithfulness with all their heart and with all their soul, you shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.” (1Ki 2:4)
3. Jehoram, one of David's offspring did not keep God's law. But, since He had made the covenant with David, the evil man was allowed to rule until God put an end to him. (2 Chr 21:7)

“It is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake.” (Rom 13:5) God doesn't want His children burning flags or acting in ways that would bring dishonor to His name. Our job is to preach the gospel and so change individual hearts. Only then can change within society be realized.

That said, we are not to obey the government if it contradicts God. When the rulers of Jerusalem ordered Peter and the other apostles to stop preaching, Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men.” (Acts 5:29) Indeed, Jesus went against both secular and religious authorities because of their aggravated stance against God's design.

I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. (1 Tim 2:1 - 4)

## Praying For The Lost Is A Waste Of Time

Some folks think that praying for the lost is a waste of time. Calvinists, who think God predestined us to be saved or damned, say that even grandma's supplications to God will do no good. So why did Paul pray for the lost Jews to be saved?

Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. (Rom 10:1)

Some are going to refute this by saying the Jews were God's chosen people, to begin with. Yet the first few chapters of Romans condemns the Jews for their proud reliance on being God's chosen people and relying on their ancestry from Abraham. (Romans 2 – 4)

Prayer alone won't get the job done, however. All the prayers in the world won't lead anyone to salvation unless they hear the word of God being preached.

We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, *who was a worshiper of God*. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. (Acts 16:13-14)

Lydia worshiped God but she was not saved. That said, preaching won't change a heart hardened against God. This is where behavior becomes a testimony.

Wives, in the same way, be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over *without words* by the behavior of their wives, when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. (1 Peter 3:1-2)

Unfortunately, many do nothing *but* pray. They prefer prayer to preaching, never realizing that they may very well be God's instruments. While Peter is dealing with the close, day-to-day relationship between husband and wife, there eventually comes a time when you have to lay it out for others. Do you care about them, or are you willing to let them go blindly into eternity? This lack of concern is addressed in Ezekiel:

I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. When I say to the wicked, "O wicked man, you will surely die," and you do not speak out to dissuade him from his ways, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. But if you do warn the wicked man to turn from his ways and he does not do so, he will die for his sin, but you will have saved yourself. (Ezek 33:7-9)

## **Adolph Hitler Could Have Been Saved If He Had Asked Jesus Into His Heart Just Before He Died**

Let's face the facts: we don't know what was in Hitler's heart when he died. But we can know, with relative certainty, that the Bible does not teach such a thing. Consider this verse:

Don't be misled; remember that you can't ignore God and get away with it: a man will always reap just the kind of crop he sows! If he sows to please his own wrong desires, he will be planting seeds of evil and he will surely reap a harvest of spiritual decay and death; but if he plants the good things of the Spirit, he will reap the everlasting life that the Holy Spirit gives him. (Gal 6:7-8) TLB

The Thief on the Cross is often used as the example that someone can be saved just before death. But a thief who steals out of hunger or need is a far cry from some monster who sent untold thousands to their deaths out of pure hatred.

There's this idea that God is so forgiving. While this is true, He's not fooled. Scriptures teach that He has and does withhold His love from certain persons. This was true with many Jews who rejected Christ. (Mark 4:12) Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is an unforgivable sin. (Mark 3:29)

It's not surprising that many think they can live like there's no tomorrow and then slip into heaven at the very end. This attitude is an ancient sin.

The Lord God called you to repent, to weep and mourn, to shave your heads in sorrow for your sins, and to wear clothes made of sackcloth to show your remorse. But instead, you sing and dance and play, and feast and drink. "Let us eat, drink, and be merry," you say: "What's the difference, for tomorrow we die." The Lord Almighty has revealed to me that this sin will never be forgiven you until the day you die. TLB (Isa 22:12-14)

Many think blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is the only unforgivable sin. But as Isaiah, said, there are certain attitudes that God just will not abide.

On top of all this, nowhere does the Bible teach that "asking Jesus into your heart" is the method for salvation. You must believe (John 8:24), confess before men (Rom 10:9), repent (Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38), and be baptized (Acts 2:38; 22:16; Gal 3:27). I don't think Hitler had time to do all those things, much less the inclination.

## **Bible Teachers Will Be Judged Under A Stricter Standard Because Of Their Interpretation Of The Scriptures**

First off, let's present the verse in question:

Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment. (James 3:1)

Second, I know of no one, not even the most highly educated man, who has a complete grasp of the Bible. Yet every time I hear this verse the teacher or preacher always interprets it to mean God will hold them accountable based on how accurately (or inaccurately) they taught the scriptures. That said, if God were to judge us on how well we knew the Bible, we'd all be in serious trouble. But is James referring to teaching?

The first rule of exegesis is *context*. Always look at a verse's context when determining the meaning. What is James speaking of immediately following verse 1? *The tongue and how much trouble it causes when not controlled*. When you get to chapter 4, he says, "What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you?" Quarreling involves the tongue, not bad teaching. Is accurately understanding scripture the reason for limiting the number of teachers? I think the better answer involves hypocrisy, not how intelligent someone is. Otherwise, what did Paul mean when he said, "Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said."? (1 Cor 14:29) So even though these were Spirit-gifted speakers, they were still judged by others in the congregation. Thus, the issue is not so much how many teachers there are. It is not quantity, but quality. Note Jesus' words:

The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. *But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach*. (Matt 23:2-3) NIV

That's why James writes about the tongue. Many Bible teachers claim that the only way to not suffer the stricter judgment is to get a Bible college degree so you won't mishandle the word of truth. A college degree, however, is no guarantee against error. Moreover, it falsely assumes that teaching only takes place in a formal study or "worship" hour. In reality, most practical and important Bible discussions take place in the home, around campfires, or in bed late at night. It's not always about formal lectures.

This brings up one of the unfortunate side effects that "only the preacher" (or designated teacher) should be leading the lesson. The majority of folks would rather invite someone

to church to get their questions answered because they are woefully ignorant of what the Bible says.

Though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. (Heb 5:12)

The Hebrew writer was telling his audience, “You guys need to learn the truths of God's word and quit mucking around with basic principles!” In an ideal setting, the folks sitting in the pews should gradually reach an understanding of the Bible that equals or comes close to that of their teacher's. This is not the case, however.

How many times have you heard someone ask the teacher halfway through the class, “What book are we in?” Someone who has been attending church for decades should know after hearing just a few verses.

I attended a One-Copper Church of Christ in Purdy, Washington for a couple of years. Every Sunday was about faith, confession, repentance, and baptism. Nothing else. I've sat with other gray heads who had spent years in church and still failed to grasp much of the Bible. Like the Purdy church, the attitude is “I know enough to be saved and that's good enough.” On the other hand, the teacher never expects the students to reach his level, and the students forever remain students.

The arrangement of one person forever being the teacher or preacher, and the clergy forever being the students seems to satisfy most folks. It's a good device for keeping out the false teachers, but it also has unfortunate side effects. Does not the church have enough problems? Do we also need the teacher to risk his very soul, along with everyone else?



## Priests And Nuns Can't Get Married

Peter, whom the Catholics believe was the first pope, was married. (Matt 8:14; John 1:42; 1 Cor 9:5) According to Jewish literature, being married was a prerequisite for being on the Sanhedrin, of which Paul was a member. His wife had either died or left him; the Bible doesn't say. The point is, he had to be married to be on the Sanhedrin.

The legislation that forbids a priest or nun to marry is man-made and contradicts clear teaching on the subject:

The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. *They forbid people to marry* and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth. For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer. (1 Tim 4:1-5)

Notice that forbidding marriage falls under the category for *doctrines or teachings of demons*. Want to know how Satan operates in the world? Primarily through religion.

God instituted marriage in Genesis, and He said it was "good." Certain men come along and say, "It's not good; we must change a few things." God told Adam and Eve if they ate from a certain tree they would die. The serpent came along and said, "Phooey! Let's change things!" Because men are listening to Satan, all kinds of sexual perversion have run rampant because people have tried suppressing God-ordained urges out of a misguided sense of pious religious sense.

Paul said in 1 Corinthians 7:1, "It is good for a man not to marry." He also said in verse 8, "It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I am." But he doesn't condemn marriage for any certain group. The next sentences qualify his words:

Since there is so much immorality, each man should have his own wife, and each woman her own husband. (1 Cor 7:2)

If (single people) cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion. (1 Cor 7:9)

Paul said it was good not to marry; he didn't say it was forbidden. The graveyards of aborted fetuses found in early Catholic cemeteries were put there by those seeking to hide their acts. This is what happens when men refuse to follow God's way. The wave of

child molestation cases uncovered in the Catholic church testify to this erroneous teaching and has caused the world to look upon all of Christendom as a religion of liars, hypocrites, and perverts.

This is a subject for another article, but let me say this: Catholicism is a cult. They are right up there with Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Scientologists. None of the so-called Popes or bishops were Christian; they were politicians wearing religious attire and speaking religious words. As time marched forward, their attire became more and more ostentatious; their words rose to the level of a god. Inventing their discernment of God's mind, they declared the Roman pontiff's interpretations as superior to God's word.

Scientists and other academicians were put to death by order of popes and bishops throughout history. Good men who sought to translate the Latin Bible into the common tongue were hunted down and executed. Untold thousands of women were destroyed as witches both in Europe and America. Unimaginable tortures were devised by them to murder anyone who disagreed. They sent their "emissaries" to foreign continents with orders from the Pope: "Convert them or kill them—and bring me their treasures." Check the historical literature for yourself.

The list of sins by the popes and their cronies is long and horrific. Don't expect to see any of them in heaven.

## **You're Judging Me; Jesus Said, "Thou Shalt Not Judge."**

This is what people cry as soon as you point to their sin. "You're judging me! The Bible says you shouldn't judge others!" The Bible says we *can* judge if our own house is in order. (More on this later.) Second, it is not us, *per se*, who are doing the judging, it is God's Word:

The word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account. (Heb 4:12-13)

Jesus said you can judge but only after you've cleaned up your own act. His words, "do not judge so that you will not be judged," (Matt 7:1) need to be taken in context. He defines judgment with a humorous illustration:

"Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye, but don't see the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take that speck out of your eye,' while you've got a log sticking out of your own eye?"

Jesus said that before you judge someone—point out their fault—first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of (judge) your brother's eye. The fact of the matter is, people hate a flashlight being shined on their wrongdoing.

This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God. (John 3:19)

Listen up, Christians: It isn't our business to go around "judging" sinners; they stand condemned already. We should be seeking to bring them to Christ, not condemn them for doing the same things we did in times past. Even Solomon said, "Be not overly righteous, and do not make yourself too wise. Why should you destroy yourself?" (Ecc 7:16) Within the church, however, we are to be our brother's keeper (1 Cor 5:12).

## **It Doesn't Matter What One Believes, Just As Long As You Treat People Right**

Folks have this notion that God runs the universe like Walmart, where all you have to do is smile and practice good customer service skills to get on His good side. Jesus said, however, “He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; *the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day.*” (John 12:48) In other words, a person has to have faith in Christ and His Word, the Bible. Without it, a person can believe whatever philosophy they want—it will do them no good beyond the grave.

There are all kinds of roads to heaven, or so we think and are told by modern-day pop culture stars. Here are Jesus' words:

Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it. (Matt 7:13-14)

There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death. (Prov 14:12)

As far as practicing the Golden Rule—which many believe sufficient to enter heaven:

If you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? (Tax collectors were regarded as the scum of the earth.) If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matt 5:46-48)

The context clarifies being perfect in the same way God extends His blessings (the sun, rain, etc) on both good and evil people. It's not speaking of never making a mistake. So, if you loan money to your buddy but withhold help from a stranger, you're not acting as God would act; you're discriminating. You're not practicing the Golden Rule.

You cannot treat people right and also reject Jesus Christ as the means of forgiveness and salvation. The most hated verse in the Bible: “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.” (John 14:6) You don't get to heaven without Christ.

Just being a “nice” guy or gal is not going to hack it at the Judgment Seat.

## **A Person Shouldn't Take Narcotic-Based Prescription Medication**

This belief usually goes away once a person has had surgery. I've seen die-hard anti-narcotic folk suddenly embrace the morphine after having a hip replacement or some other surgery.

There are people, both Christian and non-Christian, who share a common belief that the use of prescribed narcotic-based pain medication is wrong. Some believe that using them has a moral downside. In other words, anything that makes you feel good is somehow wrong. Others are more concerned with physical addiction. I've known parents who wouldn't give their children pain medication after surgery, ignorantly believing that the child would start robbing liquor stores to maintain their habit.

To condemn something that helps alleviate pain and suffering (generally making life easier) is a belief that stems from mostly young Christians who haven't experienced surgery, wisdom tooth extractions, and so forth. But I've also known older folks who held the same belief. Why? *Simply because the medication gives one a sense of well-being.* Now if the pills make you vomit, give you cramps, headaches, and what-not, then that's good medicine! Better to suffer in the throes of misery than experience a "sinful" high.

When doctors were investigating anesthesia in the 17th and 18th centuries, preachers were quick to point out that it was of the devil, forgetting that God Himself put Adam to sleep to remove a rib. Adam was fortunate that those surgeons did not perform the surgery.

When I was in Walter Reed hospital, there was an old man in his 80's, dying of cancer in the next room. The nurses would give him hourly injections of morphine to help relieve his misery as he migrated towards death. The rest of us on the ward could set our watches by his screams of agony when his next shot was due. To this day, I remember that poor guy's screams.

The morally misguided have never had surgery, have never suffered (or seen a loved one suffer) through terminal cancer, or experienced other debilitating pain. I suffered second- and third-degree burns on both legs and feet, spending 2 weeks in a regional burn treatment center. I can only describe the pain as if I had waded into a pool of molten lava. Without such drugs, I would have died of shock.

The New Testament condemns the idea that avoiding certain things makes you more godly and righteous:

...why...do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!" (which all refer to things destined to perish with use)—in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? These are matters which have, to be sure, *the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body*, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence. (Col 2:20-23) (Emphasis mine)

In their opinion, taking Motrin for Stage 4 cancer may not be as effective, but it'll cleanse your soul. Better to writhe on your bed in excruciating pain (*self-abasement and severe treatment of the body*) with a couple of aspirin in your gut rather than enjoy the miserable few days you have left.

Adding to this is the idea that some in the church believe that women should deliver babies without the help of drugs. They base this on God's pronouncement on Eve:

I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth. In pain you will bring forth children. (Gen 3:16)

Genesis 3:16 has to do with God multiplying sorrow upon sorrow both during and after pregnancy. God could have been referring to the physical pain of childbirth, but it could also have to do with a mother's knowledge that she's bringing a dead person into the world, a sinner doomed to die. Men who promote this should look at Adam's curse: that of doing hard, miserable work to eat. I would suggest that if you're going to insist your wife deliver a child without pain meds, that you also give up your desk job and find work digging ditches or planting crops.

When God made this world, He provided the compounds necessary to make everything we've imagined, including drugs. Like guns and knives, drugs can and are used for evil. Guns can bring home dinner or they can murder. In the same way, drugs are a pathway to addiction from abuse, but they also provide relief to those suffering legitimate, crippling pain. To condemn their use simply because of a pleasant side effect shows a gross ignorance of the Bible and a basic lack of empathy toward others.

## **You Have To Have A College Degree To Be A Preacher**

If that's the case, most of us are in serious trouble.

Christianity is based on facts—truth. Jesus said that God's word is truth. (John 17:17) Those facts can be taught in a classroom setting. But Christianity is not just about facts—it's about relationships, something that can only be taught from living life.

While the premise has good intentions, it also seeks to block any efforts from those of us who have no pedigree. We're not allowed to teach, preach, or have our opinions taken seriously. Fortunately, the Church of Christ doesn't hold to this and will allow anyone who can assemble a decent lesson to teach or preach. Mostly. Many CoCs have installed preachers. At any rate, when I preached as a young man, the older members rendered judgment on whether or not I knew what I was talking about. I spent many an hour in back rooms listening to wiser heads after giving a lesson. I look back on those days with shame.

On the downside, you get a lot of bad sermons and Bible studies if you have an inexperienced younger man behind the pulpit. When the paid preacher left the small Church of Christ I attended, the men (all young military types) decided to rotate the sermons. When certain ones had their turn in the barrel, I always hoped no visitors showed up. The lessons were terrible. But who said Sunday morning is where a person gets spiritual nourishment? Every man should be able to discern the word of God, not just the preacher.

When I moved to the Christian Church (same as the Church of Christ but without the legalism) it didn't take me long to figure out that the lack of a college degree placed me in the "know nothing" flock. Only the teacher—a man I admired greatly—had the knowledge. The Christian Church has good reasons for restricting teaching/preaching positions to those with conservative Bible college and university degrees. There are many false teachers out there. And besides, folks see the same man upfront and get a sense of reassurance that things are stable.

A twenty-something graduate may be able to come out of a Bible college knowing how to read Greek and quote verses from memory, but they lack the experience, hard times, and other tools that can only be sharpened on Life's grinding wheel.

## I'm A Good Person

Note the Bible on this issue:

There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one. (Rom 3:10-12)

Sounds pretty harsh, doesn't it? Fact is, most of us neither recognize nor understand God's holy nature. His holiness cannot be described, only proclaimed. (Isa 6:3) He absolutely cannot tolerate sin. It's like taking a wire you plug into a wall socket and touch the two wires together at the opposite end. There's nothing you can do that will stop the circuit breaker from tripping. They cannot exist in harmony. The building will burn down before they get along. Good and Evil cannot coexist, regardless of what the bumper stickers advertise.

Another problem is that many of us use ourselves as a standard of goodness. "I'm not like my neighbor, who gets drunk and beats his wife." Or, "I'm not like those folks in the jailhouse." But we've all got our dirty little secrets, don't we? And God sees those things. For the most part, they are small—they take place in the blink of an eye and are quickly forgotten. But they reveal the evil within. And given the right circumstances, the unsaved person can become a monster. Ask Hitler. He was a painter with a little black spot deep down inside his soul. Look what became of him when he was put into a position of power. Look at what happens to normal folks who win the lottery.

Lastly, most don't know or don't believe the Bible when it condemns sin. They believe that since they smile, are pleasant with others, and ignore negativity in still others, God will accept them. Just be nice! If this was true, then God wasted a whole lot of time and effort being tortured and killed to redeem us.

The old bromide, "don't smoke, drink or swear" was once widely popular as a standard of how righteous a person should be. Standards have been relaxed nowadays. Vaping, getting drunk only on New Year's Eve, and using "intelligent" profanity is all winked at by God, like some doting grandfather. God doesn't care if you make illegal copies of movies. He doesn't care if you keep the extra five-dollars in change the cashier handed you. Guess what? He does care.

All say the same thing: I don't need the blood of Christ. I'm good enough on my own. Maybe I sin now and then, but I've done a lot of good in my life, too. That should count for something.



They believe God will weigh the good they've done against the "mistakes" they made. Guess what? He won't. If you're found without Christ, you will lose your eternal soul. Why? Because it ain't about being good or bad; it's whether or not you've accepted the sacrifice Christ made for you on the cross.

All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags. (Isaiah 64:5, 6)

## **We Can't Help Sinning, Even After Becoming A Christian!**

Let's first be clear: Christians struggle with their sin nature until the day they die. What is bogus is the notion that Christians can't stop sinning, that they are helpless. This is based on the prevalent teaching of Romans chapter 7. If that were true, what kind of Christianity are we offering the world? If sin and the devil are dragging us along against our will, then being “filled with the Spirit” has absolutely no meaning.

Let's look at the source text used to support the idea that we are hopelessly stuck with committing sin until death do us part:

I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. *For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.* (Emphasis mine) Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. (Rom 7:15-20) <sup>2</sup>

Is this speaking of Christians? Or is Paul referring to the unconverted person? Since he is using the present tense and is speaking in the first person, people automatically assume he's speaking of the Christian, using himself as an example. If so, then it appears our regenerate state is no different than our unregenerate one. What advantage is there in working out our salvation in fear and trembling (Phil 2:12) if we're being dragged down the road, chained to Satan's pick-up truck, powerless to break free?

Again, once a person is born again, they still have to struggle with the old self. Romans 7 is dealing with the carnal (fleshly) person, the one who is hostile towards God. It is not the reflection of a Christian's battle with evil. (Eph 6:10ff) If it is speaking of the Christian, it contradicts the chapter before and the one after. Paul asks, “Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?” (Rom 6:1-2) Other verses in the same chapter follow this same line:

- We should no longer be slaves to sin—because anyone who has died has been freed from sin. (VSS. 6-7)
- Do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. (vs. 12)
- Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? (vs. 16)

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<sup>2</sup> For a thorough study of how Paul used pronouns to convince listeners, see the article, [The Christian's Dual Nature](http://www.bogadocious.com/studies.html), at [www.bogadocious.com/studies.html](http://www.bogadocious.com/studies.html)

Chapter 8: 1-13 is very clear, contradicting this false teaching:

- There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has *set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death*.
- For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; *indeed, it cannot*. (This is the unsaved person.)
- Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. *You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you*.
- We are debtors, *not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh*. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you *put to death the deeds of the body*, you will live.

God told Cain that he could win the fight against sin:

“Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, *but you must master it*.” (Gen 4:6-7)

Cain could have resisted sin but the Holy Spirit within us cannot? The Spirit is impotent? If so, why should folks embrace the Christian faith if they're going to remain helpless against sin?

I taught this lesson years ago and had the congregation convinced of what Romans 7 was about. Then another preacher showed up and he just happened to teach this chapter in our Wednesday night Bible study. I was shocked at how easily the congregation slipped back to their original interpretation. I came out of there, not only very frustrated, but there was an attitude of “justified” sin.

“I can't help it! And the Good Book even says so!”

## Christians Must Be Involved In Politics And Vote

During Paul's time, Rome was in serious trouble—financially, politically, socially, and morally. One need only do a casual reading of Edward Gibbons' *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* to get a sense of the societal problems that existed. Yet the New Testament is woefully anemic in its treatment of social and political issues existing in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century. There is no call by the apostles for Christians to get out and vote or march in protests. None of it.

I've heard preachers cry from the pulpit, "A Christian who doesn't vote isn't a Christian!" They forget that the Christian's citizenship is in heaven. (Phil 3:20) It slips their mind that we are reigning with Christ *now*.

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. (Col 3:1-3)

The Bible nowhere calls for Christians to become concerned with trying to make this world better. Christ told us to spread the gospel, to change hearts and lives. In so doing, society becomes healthier. Being the salt of the earth preserves society, allowing it to function decently. But as long as godless men crowd the halls of power, it makes little difference who is in charge. Nor does the ideology matter. Virtually any form of government can work, even communism. The problem is the unchanged hearts of men in control. Voting for Jack just to unseat John isn't going to fulfill the prayer of Jesus, where earth and heaven are to be in union with one another. (Matt 6:10)

Christians should strive to set examples for the world through their Christ-like behavior. Once the gospel regenerates individual sinners, then the world becomes a better place, so to speak. It's not going to become one simply by voting for the better candidate.

Jesus avoided the political spotlight (John 2:23-25), nor did He try and persuade His disciples to support any form of human government. His kingdom is not of this world. (John 18:36) Paul told Christians to live within the laws of the land. (Rom 13:1) Christians are to "pray for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity." (1 Tim 2:2) He said that this was God's desire, not to make the world a better place, but to provide an environment conducive to bringing sinners to Christ. (1 Tim 2:3, 4)

In the famous faith chapter of Hebrews 11, the writer speaks of many God-fearing people who shunned the offerings of their lives, preferring the world to come. None sought to make it better by marching, waving banners, and shouting for reform.

It's a person's right and privilege to vote, and we should strive to support the principles we believe in. But claiming that our salvation is in jeopardy if we don't vote is rank extremism. If you're going to add a political agenda to God's salvation plan, you're inviting His curse. (Gal. 1:8, 9)

## **Material Prosperity Is Proof Of God's Blessing**

Like most folks just starting in life, my wife and I struggled. Car troubles, not enough food on the table, bills we couldn't pay. Some older Christians in the small Church of Christ we attended suggested that some sin in our lives was forcing God to withhold His blessings. A church elder told me after services one morning, "Anyone struggling financially or doesn't have a job is proof they don't have God's blessings."

The Gospel of Prosperity, or the Health-and-Wealth gospel, as it's sometimes called, is a teaching embraced by cults and Christians alike, and contradicts the Bible:

I was envious of the arrogant, as I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no pains in their death, and their body is fat. They are not in trouble as other men, nor are they plagued like mankind. (Psa 73:3-5)

Quite the opposite of what my church elder claimed. God "will have compassion on the poor and needy, and the lives of the needy He will save." (Psa 72:13) Anyone "who mocks the poor taunts his Maker." (Prov 17:5) This doesn't sound like God is on the side of the prosperous. Those who pooh-pooh the Old Testament would do well to remember a New Testament verse:

Did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? (James 2:5)

What a person owns is not proof that God is blessing them. He very well may be blessing them, but it's not proof. Jesus said, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a person's life does not consist in the abundance of their possessions." (Luke 12:15) The square footage of your home and the number of cars in the garage is no proof of the good hand of God in your life. Conversely, if you have nothing, it doesn't mean you've somehow displeased Him, and He is, therefore, punishing you by keeping you in the poor house.

There is nothing wrong with riches but there is plenty wrong with the love of wealth. (1 Tim 6:10) Like good health, material goods are indeed a blessing from God, but they are not an indicator of those blessings.

Now that I'm old, I drive a new car, have a nice retirement check every month, and enjoy a modicum of material prosperity. None of it fell out of the sky as a reward for being a good boy in God's sight. It all belongs to Him anyway; He's just letting me borrow it.

## The Roman Empire Slaughtered Millions Of Christians

We've all heard the stories and have seen Hollywood's rendition of Christians being fed to lions and who were tortured and killed by bloodthirsty Roman dictators. Like other world dictators throughout history, the Romans certainly had their go at Christian persecution. They pale in comparison to what other world powers have done and are now doing to remove the "scourge" of Christianity from the earth.

The following can be checked by Googling any number of legitimate sites on the Internet. Here are just a few tidbits:

- More than 43 million Christians have been killed for their faith since Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection.
- It's been estimated that more Christians have been martyred in the past 100 years than in the prior 1,900 years.
- More than 26 million cases of Christian martyrdom have been documented in this century alone.
- More than 200 million Christians in over 60 nations face persecution each day—60% of these are children.
- 150,000 to 165,000 are martyred each year.

Edward Gibbons wrote the following in his monumental work, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*:<sup>3</sup>

*During a long period, from the death of Christ to that memorable rebellion, we cannot discover any traces of Roman intolerance. Perhaps they could be found in the sudden, transient, and cruel persecution exercised by Nero against the Roman Christians. But this was 35 years after Christ's death and only 2 years before Nero's.*<sup>4</sup>

*Two circumstances...insinuate that the general treatment of the Christians, who had been apprehended by the officers of justice, was not as bad as it is usually imagined to have been.*

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<sup>3</sup> Vol. 1, chapter 16

<sup>4</sup> Vol. 1, chapter 16, p. 348

1. *Christians who were condemned to work in the mines were permitted, by the humanity or negligence of their keepers, to build chapels and freely profess their religion in the midst of those dreary habitations. — Euseb. de Martyr. Palestin. c. 13.*

2. *The bishops were obliged to check and to censure the forward zeal of the Christians, who voluntarily threw themselves into the hands of the magistrates.*<sup>5</sup>

*After the church had triumphed over all her enemies, the...vanity of the captives prompted them to magnify the merit of their respective sufferings. A convenient distance of time or place gave an ample scope to the progress of fiction. The frequent instances which might be alleged of holy martyrs whose wounds had been instantly healed, whose strength had been renewed, and whose lost members had miraculously been restored, were extremely convenient for the purpose of removing every difficulty and of silencing every objection. The most extravagant legends...were applauded by the credulous multitude, countenanced by the power of the clergy, and attested by the suspicious evidence of ecclesiastical history.*

It was a Christian “thing to do” to get yourself martyred since that carried an extraordinary blessing from God. Citing various 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> Century historians, Gibbons describes Christian believers joyfully committing themselves to the flames.

I'm sure someone will point to John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* to discount some of this. Yet Foxe does not contradict the historical evidence, nor does he focus on numbers. One needs to go no further than current events to show that Christian persecution is rampant and only getting worse.

Christian persecution has crept into our society by rules of law and various policies driven by political correctness. Indeed, the chilling words of Revelation's thirteenth chapter echo Western sentiment toward Christianity:

[The beast] causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, so that no one can buy or sell unless they have the mark, (the name) of the beast or the number of its name. (Rev 13:16, 17)<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Gibbons goes into great detail concerning the desire of many early Christians to be martyred. In some cases, they did not delay their demise, running toward the fires of death screaming with joy. The church leadership had to counsel restraint for those who were desirous of martyrdom.

<sup>6</sup> Governments or kingdoms are considered “beasts” in scripture. (Dan 2:36ff) Thus, Revelation is referring to a human-made form of government whose policies are detrimental to God's people.



## **Christianity Is Too Judgmental Against Other World Religions**

Anyone who makes this claim hasn't studied history nor paid attention to the news. Religious intolerance has existed since Cain and Abel. One has only to look at the global religious madness today. Our pop culture, however, chooses to harp on how the Christian faith is intolerant toward other faiths and belief systems.

The Crusades, the Spanish Inquisition, and other "Christian" movements can be blamed for some of the hatred towards Christianity. Queen Mary and certain Popes gave orders to slaughter entire nations who did not convert to Catholicism. The Catholic Church also smothered science and anything else that threatened their grip on power. But who said they were Christians? They were ignorant, sinful, power-hungry men whose desire was to maintain control and influence over everyone else. They were not Christians, but wolves in sheep's clothing. They were the fulfillment of the apostle Paul's prophecy concerning the church. (Acts 20:29)

Mohammad made converts by the edge of the sword when few showed interest in his new religion. When the Spaniards landed on Philippine shores, the natives declined the invite to Catholicism. So they started amputating arms until the Filipinos acquiesced.

None of the Oriental religions tolerate one another. Belief in Christ in many countries will buy you the death penalty.

True Christianity is the only faith to offer salvation to all men and women, and without having to work for it. It has been the only faith to dissolve racial, gender, and social differences. The only reason it is accused of having a bad rap is that people hate Jesus Christ and the Christian Bible. Why? Because the Bible condemns all men as sinners and in need of a Savior. It gets in the way of the progressive's reach toward a humanistic utopia. They don't want to bow down to a Supreme Moral Being who will judge them for their immoral lifestyles. So they rant and rave that Christianity is judgmental, non-inclusive, etc. It is indeed, and is, in fact, the most exclusive religion on the planet. Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven. There is no other.

I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (John 14:6)

There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. (Acts 4:12)

**“The Lord Spoke To Me...”**

I was listening to a Christian radio broadcast one day, and a young lady called in. She had planned to marry someone in the church. Her plans were put on hold, however, when a young man in her church said that God had revealed to him that she must not marry that person. She was calling the radio host to get his thoughts since she had doubts and concerns. The person running the radio show started hedging his bets, telling her that she should probably listen to the person, "since he has the gift of discernment."

Claiming Divine Revelation has been the mainstay of religious hucksters for thousands of years. The best advice is to avoid anyone who claims that God or some angel spoke to them. It's documented that when Joseph Smith's wife caught him in adultery, he told her that God had revealed to him to allow or bring back polygamous marriages.<sup>7</sup>

Some of the worst monsters in history have claimed direct communication with God. Preachers who claim divine revelation, especially where money is concerned, should be avoided like the plague. Claiming some kind of superior relationship or special communication with God that only he or she is privy to is the mark of a liar. The Bible is clear that God ended personal communication and revelation with human beings with Jesus Christ:

In the past, God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son. (Heb 1:1-2)

Notice the past tense: "*has* spoken to us," not "*is* speaking to us." God didn't somehow forget to add something to the Bible and now has to speak to someone directly. While Christians all have a direct line to God through prayer, no one has a secret phone line to the Throne.

Jesus told the apostles that the Holy Spirit would provide "all truth." (John 16:13) The idea that God reveals himself to folks for specific purposes has no scriptural support whatsoever. It's only intent is to silence any naysayers so that an agenda can be achieved. Those to whom God *did* speak were pertinent to His Divine Will guiding history toward the birth of Jesus Christ. This is why history is referred to as "His Story."

Everything God has revealed to mankind has been laid out in His Last Will and Testament—the New Testament. He doesn't tell people to sell their homes and donate the money to the church. He doesn't "lay it on your heart" to abandon your job and family and head off to the foreign mission fields. Many who have listened to their own conscience, claiming God was speaking to them, met misery and failure as a result.

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<sup>7</sup> Emily D. P. Young, *Deposition, Temple Lot Transcript, Respondent's Testimony, Part 3*

Others who have had overwhelming success in such endeavors did so because they were done with much prayer, advice from others, and a good church to back them up.

Who said it was God whispering in your ear? What proof do you have? It could very well be Satan, who disguises himself as an angel of light. (2 Cor 11:15) Even if you're a Christian, does that make every thought that enters your mind from God? Or is it just the ones you *think* are His?

A person can be led by the Spirit (Rom 8:14; Gal 5:18), but this is gained through prayer, study, and application of what they learn from the Word. Being led by the Spirit doesn't mean direct and detailed conversation with God.

Since the apostles were the only ones who could dispense miraculous gifts, (Acts 8:18; 19:6) those gifts ceased to exist two thousand years ago. In a nutshell, gifts were given to prove to unbelievers that the Gospel message was authentic. Jesus told some Pharisees that a person can claim anything they say to be divine. To back up His claim for who He was, he did miraculous healings. (Mark 2:2-13)

Someone may argue, "Who are you to say God is not speaking to them? You don't know." Note the book of Jeremiah:

"Behold, I am against the prophets," declares the LORD, "who use their tongues and declare, 'declares the LORD.' Behold, I am against those who prophesy lying dreams," declares the LORD, "and who tell them and lead my people astray by their lies and their recklessness, when I did not send them or charge them. So they do not profit this people at all," declares the LORD. (Jer 23:31-32)

"Do not let your preachers deceive you, and do not listen to their dreams, for it is a lie that they are preaching to you in my name; I did not send them," declares the LORD. (Jer 29:8-9) (paraphrased)

## Christians Must Not Be Cremated

The only difference between natural decomposition and fire is speed. Both are forms of oxidation, where the core elements are broken down into “dust.” Fire is just quicker and more efficient.

There is no scripture that either condones or condemns the practice, so the debate becomes a matter of personal conviction. Unlike the hype one reads on the Internet, God’s word is relatively silent on the issue. Having talked to people about cremation, I get the distinct impression they don’t believe God can resurrect someone who has been cremated. Superstition and fear are stronger than faith in God’s power.

If cremation were against the scriptures, God would not have told Abraham to offer Isaac as a burnt offering:

Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a *burnt offering* on one of the mountains of which I will tell you. (Gen 22:2)

Burnt offerings later became a part of the ceremonial law, and pointed to Christ’s death. The importance was placed on the sacrificial *death*, not its mode.

Daniel’s friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, apparently did not worry about being burned to a crisp. (Dan 3:17-18)

Being thrown into vats of molten metal or being burned alive in various horrible ways was popular for centuries. Paul wrote, “if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.” (1 Cor 13:3) His words reflect what was taking place. In *The Decline of Fall of the Roman Empire*, Edward Gibbons writes of Christians dying under Nero’s persecution:

Some were nailed to crosses; others sewed up in the skins of wild beasts and exposed to the fury of dogs; others again, smeared over with combustible materials, were used as torches to illuminate the darkness of the night. The gardens of Nero were destined for melancholy spectacle.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Tree pitch was generously applied to naked men and women, after which they were bound to a post anchored in the ground. These human torches were positioned around the periphery of Nero’s garden parties, where they provided light for the “festivities.” *Vol One, Chapter 16, p. 617*

Speaking against cremation, so-called bible scholars claim that "the Bible shows repeatedly that fire is reserved for the wicked." Then what about the many Christian martyrs who were thrown into vats of molten metal or furnaces?

Some Christians believe that physical burial must take place for a future resurrection. They base this on what Paul wrote to the church at Corinth. (1 Cor 15:42 – 44)

Based on Paul's words, Christians reason that there must be a natural body before there can be a spiritual one, and cremation prevents that from taking place. But notice it doesn't say, "if the natural body is *buried*..." He merely says, "if you possess a fleshly body, you will also have a spiritual one." Paul isn't describing a recipe for resurrection but is comparing the differences between the resurrected state as opposed to our earthly existence.

Finally, preachers argue that cremation is a poor testimony to the world of a Christian's belief in a bodily resurrection. If a Christian is cremated, they are telling the world that they didn't believe in a bodily resurrection since they "disposed" of their body via fire. This sounds pious but lays a guilt trip on a family who just can't afford an expensive funeral. It also misrepresents the deceased's convictions. As far as providing a "testimony" to the world, that should have been carried out when the person was alive, not after they're dead. My God can resurrect me from *any* state, even if my ashes were spread into outer space.

Regardless of the emotional hoopla, cremation versus burial is a matter of choice. No one should put on the judge's robes and tell you it's a sin. Nor is it the church's job to dictate such a decision, especially when the Bible makes no such attempt.

I don't have a problem with cremation, but I do gasp at the horrendous amount of money folks spend on coffins. Having attended a few funerals, I've asked about justifying the expense. A common answer is, *I don't want the worms getting to my loved one.*

## **Don't Throw Anything Away Eat Everything On Your Plate**

Most of us have probably heard it at a young age, as we sat around the dining table, not wanting to eat what mom had prepared. "Eat your food! Don't you know there are kids in Africa who are starving?" It didn't motivate me to eat collard greens and black-eyed peas. I'd have gladly given my plate to a kid from Africa.

Some folks expect you to finish what you are served. A kid spending the night at a friend's house may pile their plate high with spaghetti, only to regret it, especially when the friend's mom forces the complete consumption of whatever they brought to the table. To what end? For what purpose? I've advised my children to only put a little bit on the plate to avoid such unpleasantness.

Running behind this notion is the idea we should never throw away anything. That somehow, this is not being a "good steward" of what God has given us. Truth is, God didn't "give" us what we hoarded over the years because of our materialistic tendencies. I was visiting an old friend who owned a farm. He had tables piled high with useless junk. I asked him what a single roller skate with a missing wheel could serve him, it was the old I-might-need-a-part-off-it-later routine.

I'm so glad God doesn't bring our possessions with us when we die. Heaven would be nothing but a wasteland of old clothes, worn-out dog collars, and junk cars.

Drive down any street until you see a house with the garage doors open. What do you usually see? A garage stuffed to the brim with boxes of junk the owners are unwilling to part with. Why do you think the storage shed business is so profitable? People just can't bear to part with stuff they've never used, much less seen in years. So if hanging on to all of this material is your way of being a good steward of what God's given you, there is a reality show called *Hoarders* you might want to check out.

## **The Ground Is Cursed**

After Adam and Eve sinned, God cursed the ground, telling Adam that he would have a real hard time scratching out food from the earth.

...cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread... (Gen 3:19)

After the Flood, however, God lifted this curse:

"I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done. While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease." (Gen 8:21 – 22)

Pretty straight forward, which is why I was shocked when the folks in my Sunday morning Bible study refused to accept my "interpretation." They told me that the ground was still cursed.

I know why they didn't believe me. Yes, they were blind to the truth. But I believed the same thing most of my life. When I read the Bible, my eyes were opened. It took me many years to understand that a seed planted in a child's mind takes root and reaches deep as they become adults. It's nearly impossible to uproot, even when the truth is so plain to see.