

A MINISTRY FOR HUNGRY SAINTS

UNDER THE EXALTED CHRIST, THE GOSPEL BEGINS TO SPREAD

THE ACTS

† THE BOOK OF ACTS

OF THE APOSTLES

WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRIES, Associated

An overview of the Book of Acts, by Given O. Blakely

ACTS 5:31-32

"Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are His witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey Him."

"Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." (Acts 4:12)

Lesson #80

COMMENTARY ON: 19:13-20

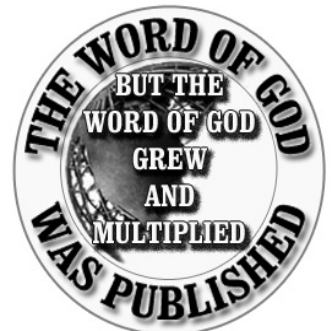
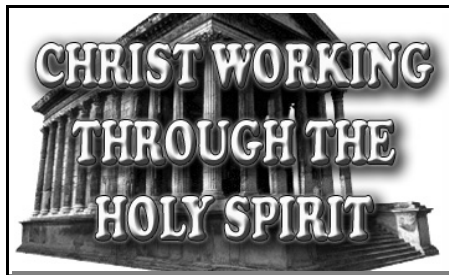
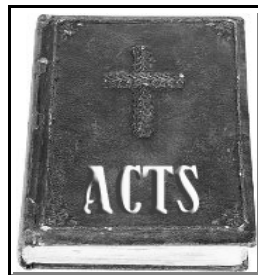
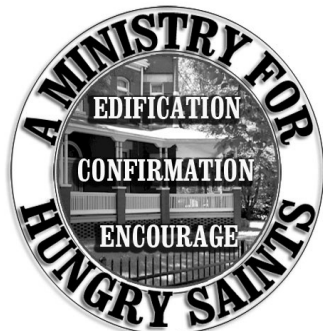
THE RESPONSE OF THE EPHESIANS

This text reports a rare occasion when some wandering Jewish exorcists took it upon themselves to expel a demon in the name the Christ whom Paul preached. Their pretension is revealed in a most unique way, revealing the impotence of religious flesh. As a result of this incident, a great awakening took place in Ephesus. Fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. Many who believed came confessing and disclosed some of their secret deeds. The renunciation of their former manners was revealed in an unusual way, yet one that perfectly comported with the nature of spiritual life. While contemporary evangelistic success is too frequently measured by numbers and some form of verbal confession alone, this renewal was marked by a stark change in conduct, and a public and effective renunciation of unacceptable practices. This, of course, revealed the reality and effectiveness of genuine conversion.

ACTS 17:26-27

"And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him, though He be not far from every one of us."

" . . . and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." (Acts 1:8)

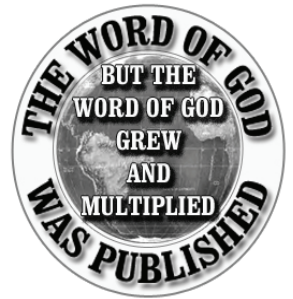


Since May, 1993, a ministry instituted for the encouragement of believers in Christ



The Book of Acts

Lesson Number 80



A MINISTRY INITIATED IN MAY 1993, AND DEDICATED TO STRENGTHENING THOSE WHO ARE IN CHRIST, BY BUILDING THEIR FAITH, ENHANCING THEIR JOY, AND STABILIZING THEIR HOPE, ENABLING THEM TO WORK OUT THEIR SALVATION WITH FEAR AND TREMBLING.

TRANSLATION LEGEND: ALT = Analytical-Literal Translation (2005), AMPLIFIED = Amplified Bible (1965), ASV = American Standard Version (1901), BBE=Bible in Basic English (1949), DRA = Douay-Rheims (1899), ERV = English Revised Version (1885), ESV = English Stand Version (2001), GNB = Good News (1966), GWN = God'S Word (1995), IE = International English (1973), ISV = International Standard Version (1967), JPS = Jewish Publication Society (1917), KJV = King James Version (1611), LITV = **Literal Translation of the Bible ((1976)**, LIVING = Living Bible (1971), MKJV = Modern KJV (1962), MONTGOMERY = Montgomery's New Testament (2001), MRD = Peshitta-James Murdock Translation (1852), NAB = New American Bible (2002), NASB = New American Standard Bible (1977), NAU = New American Standard Bible (1995), NIB = New International Bible, NIV = New International Version (1984), NJB = New Jerusalem Bible (1985), NKJV = New King James Version (1979), NLT =New Living Translation (1996), NRSV = New Revised Standard Version (1989), PHILLIPS = J B Phillips New Testament (1962), PNT = BISHOP'S New Testament (1595), RSV = Revised Standard Version (1952), TNK = JPS Tanakj (1985), Webster = The Webster Bible (1833),WEYMOUTH = Weymouth's New Testament (1903), WILLIAMS = William's New Testament (1937), TYNDALE = Tyndale's Bible (1526), WYCLIFFE = Wycliffe New Testament (1382), YLT =Young's Literal Translation (1862).

THE INSPIRED RECORD OF HOW THE ENTHRONED CHRIST, BY MEANS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, WORKED THROUGH HIS HOLY APOSTLES AND GODLY MEN, TO SPREAD THE WORD OF THE GOSPEL THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE WORLD, AND TO BRING EDIFICATION AND STABILITY TO MEMBERS OF CHRIST'S BODY.

----- **Lexicon and Bible Translation Codes with Identification** -----
LEXICON LEGEND: FRIEBERG = Friberg Lexicon, UBS = UBS Lexicon, LOUW-NIDA = Louw-Nida Lexicon, LIDDELL SCOTT = Liddell Scott Lexicon, THAYER = Thayer's Greek Lexicon, LEH = LEH Lexicon, GINGRICH = Gingrich Lexicon

DISCLAIMER: The quoting of other translations is not to be taken as a condoning of them. My purpose is rather to show the remarkable diversity, and sometimes outright contradictions that exist among these various versions of Scripture. Our understanding of the Word of God ultimately depends upon our comprehension of the Lord Himself and His eternal purpose. Where this understanding is not present, we are shut up to scholasticism and conjecture, both of which are of the world, not of God.

THE RESPONSE OF THE EPHESIANS

“19:13 Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth. **14** And there were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, and chief of the priests, which did so. **15** And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye? **16** And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. **17** And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. **18** And many that believed came, and confessed, and showed their deeds. **19** Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. **20** So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.” (Acts 19:13-20)

INTRODUCTION

This text reports a rare occasion when some wandering Jewish exorcists took it upon themselves to expel a demon in the name the Jesus whom Paul preached. Here we have a remarkable parallel to many contemporary practices that bring to men a religion contained in empty and powerless words. Although religious tradition allows for such lifeless

expressions, even the hierarchy of Satan himself does not honor such efforts. **Only men, easily swayed because of their unbelief, are moved by such theatrics.** Heaven is certainly not deceived by such religious antics, and, as this text makes abundantly evident the powers of darkness mock them in derision.

In Ephesus pretension was exposed in a most unique way, revealing the impotence of religious flesh. It is incumbent upon us to take due note of the reported event, and make a correlation with the blatant simulation of religious authority that is found in our time. This is a day of *“strong delusion,”* sent as a

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judgment from God upon an ostentatious and false church. In this lesson, I will do my best to expose the sinfulness of adopting a powerless religion, and clinging to lifeless creeds and false assumptions. Such things are a form of unbelief, dishonor the Lord Jesus, and quench the Spirit of God.

As a result of the incident reported in this passage, a great awakening took place in Ephesus. Fear fell on the citizenry, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. Many who believed came publically confessing their sins and disclosing some of their secret deeds. The renunciation of their former manners was revealed in an unusual way, yet one that perfectly comported with the nature of spiritual life.

While contemporary evangelistic success is too frequently measured by numbers and some form of verbal confession alone, this renewal was marked by a stark change in conduct, and

a public and effective renunciation of unacceptable practices. This, of course, revealed the reality and effectiveness of genuine conversion.

THE NECESSITY OF AUTHENTICITY

The very notion of the “*God of truth*” (Deut 32:4; Psa 31:5; Isa 65:16) being associated with something that is not true or real, is reprehensible beyond measure. **To represent a work that is not effective as being associated with, or even instigated by, a God from whom only truth proceeds is of such a serious nature that it cannot be adequately described.** For the God of heaven, whose works are all “*done in truth*” (Psa 33:4; 111:7-8), to be concomitant with an unholy church is such a significant misrepresentation that only the day of judgment will successfully clear the moral air of the blasphemous claim. For the Almighty God to be connected with conversions that do not result in a genuine and lasting change, is an irreverent reproach to Him. For people to wear the name “*Christian*,” yet whose manner of life stands in stark contrast with “*the Righteous One*”^{NIV} (1 John 2:1), demeans the Lord Christ, and belies any claim of being associated with Him.

The prophets prophesied of the day of salvation, affirming certain traits would be found in those who participated in it. I do not tire of mentioning them, and of drawing attention to their absence in the modern church. They are like a warning trumpet blast from heaven that identifies the spurious nature of much, if not the majority, of the professing church.

⇨ **THE CIRCUMCISION OF THE HEART.** “*And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with*

all thy soul, that thou mayest live” (Deu 30:6).

⇨ **THOROUGH SATISFACTION.** “*They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures*” (Psa 36:8).

⇨ **JOYOUS ACCESS.** “*Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation*” (Isa 12:3).

⇨ **INSIGHTFUL REJOICING.** “*And in that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness. The meek also shall increase their joy in the LORD, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel*” (Isa 29:18-19).

⇨ **HOLINESS COUPLED WITH GLADNESS.** “*And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein. No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall walk there: And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away*” (Isa 35:8-10).

⇨ **PRODUCTIVE ACQUAINTANCE WITH GOD.** “*They shall all know Me*” (Jer 31:31).

⇨ **AN ESSENTIAL CHANGE IN CHARACTER.** “*A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put*

The prophets prophesied of the day of salvation, affirming certain traits would be found in those who participated in it. I do not tire of mentioning them, and of drawing attention to their absence in the modern church. They are like a warning trumpet blast from heaven that identifies the spurious nature of much, if not the majority, of the professing church.

within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them” (Ezek 36:26-27).

I do not know how it can be established that those who lack these things have, in fact, been reconciled to God, and are enrolled in heaven. One might as well attempt to establish that a person was “*the Christ*” who did not fulfill what the prophets said of Him. If what God affirms He will do in a people is not done, how can those in whom His promised work is not apparently accomplished be established as His people? And, if His work is not really apparent in the individual, how can anyone be sure that He has really worked in such a one?

I do not know how it can be established that those who lack these things have, in fact, been reconciled to God, and are enrolled in heaven. One might as well attempt to establish that a person was “the Christ” who did not fulfill what the prophets said of Him.

When the appropriate indications of salvation were not found in a people professing to possess it, certain warnings were issued by the apostles. **The absence of the things that “*accompany salvation*” (Heb 6:9) was not glossed – and it is wrong for them to be treated so casually today.** Religious institutions – all of them – be hanged! If what God affirms to take place in salvation is not found, woe to that bigot who dares to say they are saved! Let men heed what is declared to those whose lives contradict the truth!

⇒ **THE FORFEITURE OF LIFE.** “*For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live*” (Rom 8:13).

⇒ **EMBRACING ANOTHER GOSPEL.** “*I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the*

grace of Christ unto another gospel” (Gal 1:6).

⇒ **BEWITCHED INTO NOT OBEYING THE TRUTH.** “*O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?” (Gal 3:1).*

⇒ **CHRIST IS OF NO EFFECT.** “*Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace” (Gal 5:4).*

⇒ **DO NOT LET IT HAPPEN – EVEN ONCE.** “*But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor*

jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience” (Eph 5:4-6).

⇒ **SPIRITUAL SPOILATION.** “*Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ” (Col 2:8).*

⇒ **BECOMING GOD’S ENEMY.** “*Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the*

world is the enemy of God” (James 4:4).

⇒ **THE DOMAIN OF IMPOSSIBILITY.** “*For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame” (Heb 6:6).*

⇒ **SPIRITUAL BLINDNESS.** “*But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins” (2 Pet 1:9).*

⇒ **A STATE THAT IS WORSE.** “*For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them” (2 Pet 2:20-21).*

⇒ **NO LOVE FOR OR KNOWLEDGE OF GOD.** “*Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15).*

⇒ **NO ACQUAINTANCE WITH GOD.** “*Whosoever abideth in Him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen Him, neither known Him” (1 John 3:6),*

These texts are not to be explained, **but they are to be believed!** Men are to make no attempt to blend them with their stilted theology. **They are to be believed!** If they are difficult to believe, they are to be believed anyway! These are Divine assessments, and to ignore them is to ignore God Himself. Their power is found in their affirmation and the embrace of faith. Further, they

are to be declared to the church, for they are affirmations, and they are addressed to the church. They are Divine statements of the reality of the case. There is not the slightest possibility that they are inaccurate. It is not possible that they do not reflect the character and will of God.

The lack of these qualities among a people professing to be of Christ is, at the very best, a sign of drawing back and unbelief. Further, God has spoken to the matter of drawing back, or recoiling at His word. Additionally, drawing back is to perdition, or destruction, not to a blessing! As it is written, *“Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul”* (Heb 10:38-39). The fact is that some do NOT draw back, and some do. **Which category best describes you?**

The presence of sin in the church must not be glossed or treated as though it was normal. A holy mandate has been issued from the Throne: *“Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us”* (1 Cor 5:7). Again, *“Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear*

of God” (2 Cor 7:1). And again, *“But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy”* (1 Pet 1:15-16).

It is time for the professed

contrast to the preponderance of reported Christian results today. That contrast is certainly not owing to any change in the nature of God, or any lack of true effectiveness in the powerful Gospel of Christ (Rom 1:16). The general environment and nature of humanity has

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church to dismiss from their presence any and all men who attempt to explain sin and pacify sinners. It is time to expel those who build careers on the moral failures of people, and supply worldly-wise solutions to the dilemma of sin. They have no place among the redeemed of the Lord, and woe to that man or group that presumes to make a place for them!

THE RELEVANCE OF THESE WORDS

The relevance of this apparent diversion is seen in the nature of our text. There is a response to the presentation and discussion of *“things concerning the kingdom of God”* that stands in stark

not changed. A different Gospel has not been given from heaven. The Holy Spirit has not altered His indispensable ministry. The glorification of Christ Jesus has certainly not amended His essential character. The objectives for the church have not been reissued. **All of the changes – every single one of them – are on the part of men.**

Further, all valid moral and character change is associated directly with man’s relationship to God, whether it is for weal or woe, good or evil, blessing or cursing. It seems to me that this is beyond all controversy. – even though it is difficult for some to receive.

VAGABOND JEWS ENCOUNTER A REAL DEMON

“ 19:13a Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus . . . ”

In his record of the activities of early believers, Luke is careful to write in such a manner as to expose the absolute distinction between religious pretension and error, and the truth of God and its impact upon the human spirit. **Error is never tolerated or never viewed as inconsequential.** Behavior that is out of harmony with the nature of salvation is also duly noted and rebuked. There is a remarkable consistency in all of this so that the issues of life are made quite clear.

⇔ On the day of Pentecost, Peter quickly pointed out the erroneous judgment of the Jews who demanded the death of Jesus (Acts 2:22-23).

⇔ When those who witnessed the healing of the lame man at the gate Beautiful beheld Peter and John as though they had done this under their own power, they were quickly and thoroughly corrected (Acts 3:11-26).

⇔ When Ananias and Sapphira lied to the Holy Spirit, and misrepresented their commitment to the Lord and His work, they were promptly rebuked and judged (Acts 5:1-10).

⇔ When the Jewish council balked at the preaching of Stephen, he exposed their hearts, doing so publically (Acts 7:51).

⇔ When Simon sought to buy the ability to confer the Holy Spirit by the laying on of his hands, Peter soundly rebuked him, saying he had no part in the matter (Acts 8:19-24).

⇔ When an Ethiopian eunuch was confused about the meaning of Scripture, one was sent to declare the truth of that text to him (Acts 8:26-39).

⇔ When Cornelius sought to pay undue

homage to Peter, the apostle refused to allow him to do it (Acts 10:22-23).

- ⇒ When Elymas opposed the truth and attempted to interfere with its proclamation, Paul soundly rebuked him, pronounced him an enemy, and struck him blind for a season (Acts 13:8-11).
- ⇒ When the Jews in Antioch contradicted and blasphemed what Paul was preaching, he said they had judged themselves unworthy of eternal life, and promptly left with Barnabas (Acts 13:45-46).
- ⇒ When idolatrous men in Lystra sought to honor Paul and Barnabas as though they were gods, the men of God tore their clothes and ran among them, restraining what they sought to do (Acts 14:8-18).
- ⇒ When certain Jews taught that it was necessary to be circumcised after the manner of Moses, the leaders promptly addressed the matter, sent to the apostles, and delivered corrective teaching to all of the churches (Acts 15:1-31).
- ⇒ When the philosophers in Athens mocked Paul's preaching of the resurrection, he left the area (Acts 17:32-33).
- ⇒ When certain in Corinth blasphemed, Paul shook his garment and said their blood was on their own heads (Acts 18:4-5).
- ⇒ When Aquila and Priscilla saw that Apollos was deficient in his understanding, they taught him more perfectly in the way of the Lord (Acts 18:25-26).
- ⇒ When Paul confronted some disciples in Ephesus who were unaware of the need for believing on Christ, he promptly informed them of the deficiency of their baptism and the need for believing on Christ (Acts 19:1-5).

In our day, a certain tolerance of both error and ignorance pervades the professing church. **Such an attitude is antithetical to everything we know**

about the Lord. In fact, we are told that God Himself is no longer tolerant of ignorance. Now, since Jesus has been exalted to His right hand, the command is sent forth to humanity to "repent." Their ignorance of God is no longer overlooked – and that is the way it really is! "And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent" (Acts 17:30). Men are not excused from this responsibility under any circumstance.

In this economy of revealed truth, pretension, hypocrisy, and misrepresentation are wholly out of order. Our text confirms this to be true. The people of God must learn to maintain a posture that is firmly against all forms of the lie – especially those which seek to distort Christ and His great salvation.

VAGABOND JEWS

"Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists . . ." Other versions read, "itinerate Jewish exorcists,"^{NKJV} "Jewish exorcists, who went from place to place,"^{NASB} "Jews who went around driving out evil spirits,"^{NIV} "strolling Jews, exorcists,"^{ASV} "Jews used to travel from place to place and force evil spirits out of people,"^{GWN} "excising demons,"^{MRD} "traveling from town to town casting out evil spirits,"^{NLT} "wandering Jews were also trying to make evil spirits go out of people,"^{LIVING} "Jews who went around trying to drive out demons,"^{ISV} "wandering Jews who claimed to be driving out the evil spirits,"^{WILLIAMS} and "traveling Jewish exorcists (men who adjure evil spirits)."^{AMPLIFIED}

According to some linguists, the literal rendering of this intriguing expression is "strolling Jewish exorcists."^{PULPIT COMMENTARY} The men so described were something like aimless peddlers, roaming from place to place, apparently without having a settled purpose. Although there is not a lot said about such people, Jesus did refer to them when He said, "And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? therefore they shall be your judges" (Mat 12:27). That this did, in fact, take place is confirmed by a certain incident that is recorded by Luke. "And John answered and said, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name; and we forbid him, because he followeth not with us. And Jesus said unto him, Forbid him not: for

he that is not against us is for us" (Luke 9:49-50).

This incident bears some similarity to a statement made by Paul concerning some who were preaching the Gospel of Christ. "Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will: The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds: But the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defense of the gospel. What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretense, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice" (Phil 1:16-18). **Among of other things, this confirms the exalted nature of the name of Christ.** Even when some preached the Gospel thinking to add more affliction to Paul, yet the truth was being made known, and for this Paul gave thanks. So in our text, something is reported that is certainly not an ideal circumstance. Yet, there is no reason to suspect they were nothing more than charlatans exploiting the people.

FROM JOSEPHUS, Jewish Historian

"We learn also from Josephus, 'Ant. Jud.' 8:2, 5, that forms of exorcism, said to have been invented by King Solomon, so efficacious that the devils cast out by them could never come back, were used with great effect in his days. He adds that he himself knew of an instance in which one of his own countrymen, Eleazar by name, had cast out devils in the presence of Vespasian and his sons and officers and a number of his soldiers. The method used was this: The exorcist applied to the nose of the possessed the bezil of a ring, under which was a certain root prescribed by Solomon, and so drew out the evil spirit through the man's nostrils. The possessed then fell to the ground, and the exorcist commanded the evil spirit in the name of Solomon never to return, and then recited one of Solomon's incantations. To give full assurance to the bystanders that the evil spirit had really left the man, the exorcist placed a vessel full of water at some distance off, and then commanded the ejected spirit to overturn it, which he did. Thus far Josephus."^{PULPIT COMMENTARY}

Whether or not these men actually cast out demons is not the point here. Historians and commentators are divided over this matter. Should a person explore what actually took place in the exorcisms of the nomadic Jews, several theories could be set forth.

⇒ That their works were purely pretentious, and nothing more than a delusion. The manner in which the text is reported does not lend itself to this view.

TOOK UPON THEM

“... took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus...” Other versions read, “attempted to name over those,”^{NASB}

another means of expelling demons. They seemed to sense the superiority of the name of Jesus, yet did not believe on Him.

THE DANGER OF EXPERIMENTATION

In a day when the Christian world leans heavily upon worldly wisdom, it is important to stress the danger of spiritual experimentation. It is still true that “*whatsoever is not of faith is sin*” (Rom 14:23). **That is, whatever is done, regardless of its nature or extent, that is not undergirded by the assurance and confidence of faith, is wrong.** That is precisely the point of the text in the fourteenth chapter of Romans. **Faith is the spiritual canopy over the entirety of life.** Thus it is written, “*And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him*” (Col 3:17). And again, “*Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God*” (1 Cor 10:31). And yet again, “*And that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again*” (2 Cor 5:15). **If we are to offer our bodies unto God, “a living sacrifice,” it is imperative that nothing be done that cannot be supported by our faith.** No facet of life, regardless of its seeming insignificance, can be lived with a sole regard for self, just as though there was no God.

The point of this text is the presumption involved in attempting an experiment, as it were, with the name of Jesus. It also is a sterling testimony to the impact of Jesus and those He has sent and empowered in the regions of darkness.

⇒ That they employed magical powers that were actually under the administration of the devil himself – like the magicians of Egypt in their encounter with Moses and Aaron. The text itself gives no hint that this is the case.

“*tried to invoke,*”^{NIV} “*tried to use,*”^{NRSV} “*undertook to pronounce the name,*”^{RSV} “*took upon themselves to make use of,*”^{BBE} “*tried to make use of,*”^{CJB} “*attempted to pronounce,*”^{CSB} “*took in hand to name,*”^{GENEVA} “*were disposed to exorcize,*”^{MRD} “*tried to use,*”^{NLT} “*planned to experiment,*”^{LIVING} and “*undertook to call.*”^{AMPLIFIED}

The sacrifice of our lives to God is like a thank offering for His great salvation. Admittedly, it requires considerable effort – particularly when we are in the midst of a society that emphasizes self and the realization of a more agreeable life in this present evil world. Notwithstanding, that kind of sacrifice is precisely what God demands in return for pulling us out of the moral and spiritual quagmires of sin, and setting us on a solid rock. **A proper response is demanded of those so delivered.**

⇒ That Satan used the occasion to feign exorcisms, engaging in a kind of taunting of the people. This being the case, it is difficult to understand why the Spirit referred them as exorcists instead of Satan’s workers.

The phrase “took upon them” is translated from a single Greek word (ἐπεχέλησαν). The lexical meaning of this word is, “to take in hand, undertake, attempt (anything to be done),”^{THAYER} “try,”^{FRIBERG} “to make attempt on,” and^{LIDDELL-SCOTT} “to endeavor.”^{LEH}

⇒ That Jesus had so thoroughly decimated the kingdom of darkness that they had to yield to certain devout Jews. This is a theoretic possibility, but is accompanied with certain unanswered questions.

The point here is that this was not an effort of faith. **It was an attempt to do something they had never done before, and to achieve success by some form of emulation.** In other words, it was an attempt of “*the flesh*” – something undertaken in the wisdom of men, and without regard to identity with God. It was apparently not accompanied by any prayer, or the confidence that is inherent in the faith that comes from God. The fact that they undertook this work suggests that they had not been as successful in their endeavors as they desired. If this was not the case, it makes no sense that they would experiment with

However, since the Holy Spirit did not see fit to elaborate on the subject from that viewpoint, it seems to me that men are out of order in speculating on it. **The point of this text is the presumption involved in attempting an experiment, as it were, with the name of Jesus.** It also is a sterling testimony to the impact of Jesus and those He has sent and empowered in the regions of darkness.

A CLASSIC CASE OF RELIGIOUS PRETENSION

“^{13b} ... saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth.
¹⁴ And there were seven sons of one

Sceva, a Jew, and chief of the priests, which did so.”

It appears to me that this incident is written as a brief commentary on the nature of powerless religion, and

how it is regarded among Satan's hosts. Solemnly believers are warned concerning a "form of godliness that denies the power thereof" (2 Tim 3:5). **This is a "form" that maintains the trappings of external religion, while allowing its constituents to live in the flesh.** Crucifixion is not required as it is in "true religion and undefiled" (Gal 5:24; James 1:27). **Western Christianity is, for the most part, without the cross.** Self and flesh are not debased, but are freely permitted to move about without restraint. **Like those who worship images, men bring their fleshly preferences into the church, imposing a worldly flavor on everything that is done in the name of the Lord.** Preachers hawk their wares like worldly merchants. Singers and instrumentalists throw the mantle of the world upon their music, so that it jars against spiritually sensitive souls. The result is that there is no power present in the church. Sin breaks forth with little effort. Lukewarmness thrives, and the people are content to remain ignorant – even though eternal life is knowing God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent (John 17:3). Psychiatrists are brought in to deal with what is called the human psyche, and financial counselors are summoned to assist with monetary problems. **All of this is confirmation that such people lack the power required to live acceptable before God.** Mind you, they use the name of Jesus, and readily claim identity with Him. Yet, they lack both moral and spiritual power. Paul teaches that this condition is not owing to their humanness. Rather, they have "denied," or rejected the power that always is granted with salvation. **Where that power is actually lacking, the possession of salvation is, at the very best, questionable.**

While the parallel with our text is not exact, the kind of people that are chronicled in it are a sterling example of those who lack power with God and man. **These are Jews who are experimenting with religion – trying out what they perceive to be the latest religious technique.** They themselves are not followers of Jesus, and are fundamentally unfamiliar with Him. Yet, they have heard and seen some things that have peaked their fleshly interest. With great confidence in their

own ability, they take it upon themselves to use the name of Jesus.

JESUS WHOM PAUL PREACHETH

" . . . saying, *We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth. . . .*" Other versions read, "We exorcize you," ^{NKJV} "I command you," ^{NRSV} "I give you orders," ^{BBE} "I conjure you," ^{DOUAY} "I order you," ^{GWN} "I sternly warn you," ^{NET} and "I solemnly implore and command you." ^{AMPLIFIED}

The word "adjure" means "to solemnly implore," ^{THAYER} "put someone under oath, adjure; the sense is not to be weakened to begging or imploring," ^{FRIEBERG} "command someone," ^{UBS} and "to demand that a person take an oath as to the truth of what is said or as to the certainty that one will carry out the request or command." ^{LOUW-NIDA}

To "adjure" is to issue a supposedly authoritative command. In this case, these men were commanding the demon in the name of Jesus to come

" . . . And there were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, and chief of the priests, which did so."

Here were some men who were not only from among the chosen people, they were the sons of the highest of the priests – an ordained office under the Law. **If fleshly rank has anything to do with the dispatch of Divine power, it will surely be made known through these men.**

Lest we be presumptuous in our conclusions, it is good to remember that Nadab and Abihu were **genuine** priests, and the sons of Aaron. Yet, when they attempted to offer incense to God with fire that was not lawful, He slew them, and was glorified in the process (Lev 10:1-3). Hophni and Phinehas were also very real priests – sons of "Eli the priest." Yet, even though they were involved in official service to God, they were really "sons of

However, let us project this circumstance into our own situation. If belonging to the "one true church," or going through the proper outward ordinances is all that is required, then surely God will work in the behalf of such people because of their seeming qualification.

out of the man. If the sound of the name "Jesus" is all that is required, the powers of darkness will instantly yield to it.

I cannot begin to tell you how many times I have heard Satan and his hosts commanded to do this or that in the name of Jesus. I have heard people refuse to accept what Satan is perceived to have cast upon them, whether a disease or some other thing. Some pseudo preachers tell people to command Satan to take his hands off of God's property, or give them back their children. **Such souls do well to give heed to this text, for there is much in it they ought to learn.**

When what is supposedly done in Jesus' name is powerless and ineffective, we cannot at all be sure Jesus is actually in the matter.

SONS OF THE CHIEF OF PRIESTS

Belial." In their priestly activities, they insisted on taking portions for themselves in an unlawful manner (1 Sam 2:12-17). They even "lay with the women that assembled at the door of the tabernacle" (2 Sam 2:22), therefore exploiting their office. Not only did they have no right to do this, the Lord slew them for their deeds (2 Sam 2:25,34). **They were not allowed to use a holy office for unholy activities.** Their lineage and position did not remove that fact.

However, let us project this circumstance into our own situation. If belonging to the "one true church," or going through the proper outward ordinances is all that is required, then surely God will work in the behalf of such people because of their seeming qualification. Ponder Ananias and Sapphira who exercised covetousness under the cloak of religion (Acts 5:1-11).

This demon knew about the distinctiveness of the Jesus Paul preached. Yes, even more than that, they knew the Jesus he preached was the real Jesus, and not “another” one.

It should not surprise us that some men imagine they can speak for God because they have an ordination certificate, or a degree from some theological school. This practice is so prevalent in contemporary Christendom that it is considered heretical to question it. **However, it is still wrong, and the ineffectiveness of such men to actually impact the lives of the people for righteousness is proof of it.**

The Jesus Preached by Paul

This demon knew about the distinctiveness of the Jesus Paul preached. Yes, even more than that, they knew the Jesus he preached was the real Jesus, and not “another” one (2 Cor 11:4). And, who was the Jesus Paul preached?

- ⇒ The One God anointed above everyone else (Heb 1:9).
- ⇒ The One God raised from the dead and showed to chosen witnesses (1 Cor 15:4-8).
- ⇒ The One who was made to be sin for us (2 Cor 5:21).
- ⇒ The One who was “made a curse” for us (Gal 3:13).
- ⇒ The One who was rich, yet became poor, that we through His poverty might be made rich (2 Cor 8:9).
- ⇒ The One declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead (Rom 1:4).

- ⇒ The One who sends grace and peace (Rom 1:7).
- ⇒ The One through whom God will judge the secrets of men (Rom 2:16).
- ⇒ The One through whom righteous is granted by faith (Rom 3:22).
- ⇒ The One who saves those who are coming to God through His faithful intercession (Heb 7:25).
- ⇒ The One who takes up residence in those who love Him and keep His word (John 14:21,23).
- ⇒ The One through whom “we have now received the atonement” (Rom 5:11).
- ⇒ The One through whom we are “made righteous” (Rom 5:17-19).
- ⇒ The One through whom the saved “reign in life” (Rom 5:17).
- ⇒ The One through whom we are “dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God” (Rom 6:11).
- ⇒ The One in whom we are established (2 Cor 1:21).
- ⇒ The One through whom the sweet fragrance of Christ emits through those belonging to Him (2 Cor 15-16).
- ⇒ The One through whom we are changed by the Holy Spirit while we gaze upon His glory (2 Cor 3:18).

- ⇒ The One whose love compels us to live to God’s glory (2 Cor 5:14-15).
- ⇒ The One who has delivered us from “this present evil world” (Gal 1:4).
- ⇒ The One who is “formed” within us (Gal 4:19).
- ⇒ The One who, when in us, causes the body to “be dead” (Rom 8:10).
- ⇒ The One in whom are “hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” Col 2:3).
- ⇒ The One through whom “all things” can be done (Phil 4:13).
- ⇒ The One before whom every knee will eventually bow (Phil 2:10).

This is a very small sampling of statements Paul made concerning the real Jesus. You should recognize that many of these realities are rarely mentioned in today’s church culture. There is another Jesus being preached that is more accommodating to the human condition.

Such is a spurious Jesus to whom the powers of darkness will not yield. Crafty men choose to sidestep this circumstance by speaking of addictions, family curses, generational curses, genetic makeup, and physiological circumstances. Such things, they affirm, can be corrected by special procedures they have concocted. That is why they have developed their procedures. **However, the truth of the matter is that Satan and his hosts will not yield to their word.**

Let us now behold how the powers of darkness react when men who really have no power order them, barking commands at them like a dog. How will they respond to the command?

THE INTELLIGENCE OF THE WORLD OF DARKNESS

“¹⁵ *And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?*”

Other versions read, “wicked spirit,”
DARBY/DOUAY and “the demon.”^{LIVING}

This text will give us some sound ideas about the nature of that battalion of wicked spirits against whom

we wrestle (Eph 6:12). They are intelligent, for the issuance of lies, delusions, craftiness, snares, and the likes, are evidence of intelligence. From one perspective Satan's empire is well informed, although they are not omniscient or all knowing. **In view of this, unwarranted theological simplicity is welcomed by the wicked one as an opportunity for him to dominate through delusion.** Those who promote simplistic views, and dumb-down the Gospel, have unwittingly played into the hand of our "adversary the devil" (1 Pet 5:8-9). A condition that is to be eagerly sought by all believers is one in which "we are not ignorant of his devices."

JESUS I KNOW

"And the evil spirit answered and said, *Jesus I know . . .*" Other versions read, "I recognize Jesus," ^{NASB} "said to them in reply," ^{NAB} "answering said unto them, I have knowledge of Jesus," ^{BBE} "answered, and said, Jesus I acknowledge," ^{GENEVA} "said to them, Jesus I well know," ^{MRD} "Jesus I recognize," ^{NAB} and "replied to them, I know about Jesus." ^{NET} "I have heard about Jesus," ^{IE} "[one] evil spirit retorted, Jesus I know." ^{AMPLIFIED}

As used here, the meaning of the word "know", is "to learn to know, come to know, get a knowledge of," ^{THAYER} "of intelligent comprehension know, come to understand, ascertain . . . as learning something through sense perception learn of, become aware of, find out, perceive," ^{FRIEBERG} "to have knowledge; acknowledge, recognize . . . be very certain, remember," ^{UBS} "to know about," ^{LOUW-NIDA} and "acknowledge, recognize." ^{GINGRICH}

This is **not** the knowledge or understanding that comes through faith (Heb 11:3). Evil spirits do **not** know Jesus through the familiarity of fellowship (1 Cor 1:9; Phil 3:7-14). They do **not** know Jesus because He has made Himself known to them (John 14:21,23).

These wicked spirits know Jesus because of at least three distinct experiences.

⇨ First, Jesus invaded their kingdom during His earthly ministry, when He "went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil" (Acts 10:39). During That

time, they actually knew who Jesus was. One of their number once cried out in a synagogue, "Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God" (Mark 1:24). The men from Gadara, possessed of a legion of demons, cried out, "What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time?" (Mat 8:29). When "unclean spirits" saw Jesus, they "fell down before Him, and cried, saying, Thou art the Son of God. And He straitly charged them that they should not make Him known" (Mark 3:11-12). **No demon ever argued with Jesus. None ever attacked Him, or failed to obey Him.** Evil spirits did, indeed know Jesus by adversarial experience.

to Him, they are convinced of His nature, and tremble before Him (James 2:19). Their's is not the trembling of faith, but of conscious proximity.

Thus, evil spirits yield to Jesus without any kind of resistance. They do not engage in warfare against Him, nor does Satan their leader.

PAUL I KNOW

" . . . and Paul I know . . ." Other versions read, "I know about Paul," ^{NASB} "Paul I recognize," ^{CSB} "Paul I am acquainted with," ^{DARBY} and "Paul I have heard of." ^{WEYMOUTH}

There is a level of knowledge and communication in the spiritual underworld that is staggering to consider. Contrary to much thinking, Satan's empire is not characterized by

There is a level of knowledge and communication in the spiritual underworld that is staggering to consider. Contrary to much thinking, Satan's empire is not characterized by chaos and confusion, for then it could not stand.

⇨ Satan's kingdom knows Jesus because at His cross He spoiled and plundered them, wresting their captives from their hands, and decimating their empire. Thus it is written, "And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it" Col 2:15).

⇨ The hosts of darkness know Jesus because in His ascension He "led captivity captive," or "led a train of vanquished foes" ^{AMPLIFIED} (Eph 4:8). From the time of His resurrection, these wicked hosts have been absolutely and fully under the control of Jesus. As it is written of Jesus, "Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him" (1 Pet 3:22).

⇨ Because they have personally confronted the Lord Jesus, been conquered by Him, and made subject

chaos and confusion, for then it could not stand. Jesus once said of our adversary, "And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand?" (Matt 12:26). Heaven is not divided either. **It is only upon earth that personalities are divided.**

Apparently news traveled among the hosts of hell as Paul went here and there, assaulting the kingdom of darkness. This particular evil spirit was well aware of Paul. No doubt others who were laboring together with Christ in such a manner were also known among the hosts of darkness. Some of their number had been subject to Paul, who had been empowered by the One who had thoroughly defeated them as they gathered together against Him.

WHO ARE YOU?

" . . . but who are ye?" Other versions read, "who are you" (plural), ^{NASB/NIV} and "who on earth are you?" ^{PHILLIPS}

This demon refused to yield to the words of these men because they had not been sent by Jesus, and were not His followers. They did not have power in the world of dark spirits, and were nothing more than deceivers – and this demon knew it.

This demon refused to yield to the words of these men because they had not been sent by Jesus, and were not His followers. They did not have power in the world of dark spirits, and were nothing more than deceivers – and this demon knew it.

What We Learn from This

Those who have not received power to work miracles and cast out demons ought not to conduct themselves as though they had. If they have no such power, let them not pretend as though they did, calling out, shouting, and going through rituals they think will work.

There is such a thing as

failure that is traced back to presumption. This is a serious sin that leads to the “great transgression” – or one from which recovery is not possible. Thus the man after God’s own heart prayed, “Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression” (Psa 19:13).

Also, consider that it is quite possible that the failure of human programs is also owing to the refusal of the powers of darkness to yield to such attempts to improve human behavior.

Education cannot produce

spiritual empowerment. Neither can the official sanction of a religious institution confer power in spiritual domains. **At no point is the work of God accomplished or assisted by the wisdom and approval of men.** It is imperative that believers learn this truth and operate within its confines. Today, there is an enormous amount of activity within the professing church that is more related to the work of the sons of Sceva than they are to the work of the Lord.

It should surprise no informed soul:

- ⇨ It should not surprise that Satan’s hosts do not react in the identical manner reported in our text us.
- ⇨ That they do refuse to yield to institutional authority is confirmed by the presence and growth of sin within the professing church.

The bane of the modern church is its abysmal level of spiritual understanding, and its glaring impotence in the arena of conflict. These are not indicators of good things!

THE IMPOTENCE OF FLESH AGAINST SPIRITUAL DARKNESS

^{16a} **And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them . . .** Other versions read, “leaped on them and overpowered them,” ^{NKJV} “leaped on them and subdued them,” ^{NASB} “jumped on them and overpowered them all,” ^{NIV} “leaped on them, mastered them all, and so overpowered them,” ^{NRSV} “prevailed against them,” ^{BEB} “fell upon them, overpowered them and gave them such a beating,” ^{CJB} “attacked them. He beat them up so badly,” ^{GWN} “sprang at them and subdued them all,” ^{NAB} “jumped on them and beat them all into submission,” ^{NET} “hurled himself at them and overpowered first one and then another, and handled them so violently,” ^{NJB} “ran on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them,” ^{PNT} and “jumped on these Jews. He was much stronger than they were. He beat them up.” ^{IE}

Several versions read that the

man leaped on “two” men (Darby, ERV, Living, Weymouth, Montgomery, and Amplified). This is based on some variant manuscripts, and a flawed interpretation of what they actually say. Technically, even those manuscripts can mean “more than two” – a phrase that does not give a specific number, only that it is more than two. **However, there is no need for these linguistic gyrations, since the text has already identified the number of men involved: “seven sons of one Sceva,”** declaring that they were all involved in this account (verse 14). Those professed language experts that toy with the text of Scripture bring no true benefit to the children of God. **Rather, through their sloppy manners, they inject the virus of doubt into the minds of men.** That doubt, like leaven, spreads throughout the entirety of thought, finally yielding the fruit of unbelief, which will damn the soul. Such men should not be allowed to tamper with the Word of

God, for when they “wrest” it, they do so to their own destruction (2 Pet 3:16). I understand that such comments are irritating to those who overstate the value of the human analysis of language. However, their liberty with the text is equally irritating to those who treasure the Word of God. Besides this, God has not conferred upon men the liberty to manipulate what He has revealed. If we “live by every word of God” (Lk 4:4), we will not condone men handling it like they do the writings of mere men.

THE MAN LEAPED ON THEM

Here was a man controlled by an “evil spirit,” and it made him stronger and more agile than seven grown men. Something similar occurred in the demoniac from Gadara, who, under the influence of a legion of demons, was able to break the “fetters and chains” with which men bound him (Mk 5:3). It is written that “the chains had been pulled

apart by him, and the shackles broken in pieces”^{NKJV} by him (Mk 5:4).

In this, the relative frailty of the human constitution is accented. Men are, in every way, inferior to God, Christ Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. **If any or all of these are against us, no one can effectively be for us.** In matters of strength and wisdom, men are inferior to the holy angels – all of them. Were we to contend with a holy angel, there would be no way we could prevail. In strength and aptitude, they are also inferior to Satan and all of his hosts. Were it not for the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, and the faith that appropriates it, these forces would be our thorough undoing.

FOR THOSE WHO ARE ACCUSTOMED TO MORAL FAILURE

Since the capture of the professed church by the psychoanalysts and professionals, moral failures have increased exponentially. **This has proved to be an opportunity for religious charlatans to develop new and lucrative careers that depend on the ongoing nature of moral failure.** However, there is something to be learned from this text that is germane to this circumstance. **If an “evil spirit” can cause an individual to do things outside of the scope of ordinary human ability, what can the indwelling Holy Spirit do?** What holy aptitudes can be found in those in whom the Spirit dwells, and is not grieved or quenched? Ponder *“the fruit of the Spirit”* that is produced in the believer (Gal 5:22-23). Think of the dominating hope that comes, together with the ability to purify oneself (Rom 15:13; 1 John 3:1). Consider the obedience that is wrought *“through the Spirit”* (1 Pet 1:22), and putting *“to*

When it comes to the matter of sin, no person in Christ Jesus is helpless. Their lives are not out of control unless they are neglecting God’s great salvation.

death the deeds of the body” (Rom 8:13). God’s people must never permit a compromise with the flesh – not in view of the distinct and effective advantages that are given to them in the salvation of God! **Ponder some of those advantages, and then you will see how absurd it is to make any attempt to explain or justify sin in a professed Christian.** Believers have been:

- ⇨ Begotten of God (1 John 5:18).
- ⇨ Born again (1 Pet 1:23).
- ⇨ Are a new creation (Eph 2:10).
- ⇨ Are reconciled unto God (Col 1:20).
- ⇨ Have peace with God (Rom 5:1).
- ⇨ Have access to God (Eph 3:12).
- ⇨ Can obtain mercy and find grace to help in the time of need (Heb 4:16).
- ⇨ Have been given the Holy Spirit (Gal 4:6; 1 Thess 4:8).
- ⇨ Have been given the whole armor of God (Eph 6:10-18).
- ⇨ Have been given spiritual weapons that are mighty through God (2 Cor 10:3-5).
- ⇨ He that is in them is greater than he that is in the world (1 John 4:4).

- ⇨ If they resist the devil, he will flee from them (James 4:7).
- ⇨ The Holy Spirit makes intercession for them (Rom 8:26-27).
- ⇨ Jesus ever lives to intercede for them (Heb 7:25).
- ⇨ Their temptations are managed from heaven (1 Cor 10:13).
- ⇨ They can do all things they are required to do through Christ (Phil 4:13).
- ⇨ They are not debtors to the flesh, or forced to obey its lusts (Rom 8:13).
- ⇨ The same grace of God that brings salvation to them also effectively teaches them to reject worldly lusts and live godly (Tit 2:11-12).
- ⇨ The Holy Spirit is present in them to lead in the mortification of the deeds of the body (Rom 8:13).

When it comes to the matter of sin, no person in Christ Jesus is helpless. Their lives are not out of control unless they are neglecting God’s great salvation. Candidly, I do not believe this is being declared among believers. If this assessment is correct, it profoundly accounts for the miserable state in which Christendom finds itself. The whole condition is inexcusable.

THE EPITAPH OF SPIRITUAL FAILURE

^{16b} **... so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.** Other versions read, *“naked and bleeding,”* ^{NIV} *“wounded and without their clothing,”* ^{BBE} *“denuded and bruised,”* ^{MRD} *“stripped of their clothing and badly mauled,”* ^{NJB} *“naked and battered,”* ^{NLT} *“naked and badly injured,”*

^{LIVING} *“stripped naked and wounded,”* ^{AMPLIFIED} and *“wounded, with their clothes torn off their back,”* ^{PHILLIPS}

What a pathetic sight it must have been! Seven roaming Jewish exorcists running naked and bleeding from a house in which they had attempted

an exorcism in Jesus’ name – the Jesus that Paul preached. It seems to me that this is the ultimate humiliation – not only to fail in what you do, but to be severely wounded in the process. Instead of driving out a single demon, that demon so strengthened the man in whom he was dwelling, that the man pummeled the

would-be exorcists into submission, tore the clothes off of them, and sent them out of the house badly mauled.

Among other things, this confirms that Divine power, whether it is sought for blessing or for cursing, is not implemented by means of a mere formula. There is no set of words that have been given to the sons of men that, of themselves, are capable of bring the power of God to bear upon a situation. The mere sound of a human voice does not of itself draw the power of God into the situation.

Exorcists being mauled by a

demon-possessed man is similar to certain situations that are taking place in the Christian community. Often we hear of marriage counselors whose own marriages are in shambles. There have been national evangelists who have chided people for immorality, yet have themselves been caught in the trap of moral wickedness. All of this accents that true life and kingdom authority cannot be emulated. They cannot be arrogated to oneself by an act of the will or the adoption of a sectarian creed. If there is no vital connection with the Lord of glory, His name cannot be effectively employed. Neither heaven nor hell will respond favorably to such efforts.

Let it be clear, there is no such thing as effective religion that is by proxy, or in the name of a Christ who is not personally known and embraced. Second hand religion is a bane to any society. Yet, it is all about us, and in increasing measures. Sectarianism, religious tradition, and denominationalism, are founded in the second hand concept. A system is embraced that is impersonal. Things are taught that have not been perceived or experienced, and the fear of God is taught by the precept of men (Isa 29:13). These are deplorable practices, and their failure will be the epitaph over their institutional grave.

THE IMPACT OF THE REPORT OF THE WORKING OF THE LORD

“¹⁷ And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified.”

utterly destroyed” (Josh 2:10). “For the LORD your God dried up the waters of Jordan from before you, until ye were passed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red sea,

It is a principle of God's kingdom that His works are known where they are wrought. The report of the working of the Lord gets out. In this manner the whole earth continues to be full of His glory.

It is a principle of God's kingdom that His works are known where they are wrought. The report of the working of the Lord gets out. In this manner the whole earth continues to be full of His glory (Isa 6:3). The following are examples of this kind of working, which is consistent in Scripture.

⇨ **ISRAEL'S DELIVERANCE.** When Israel was delivered from Egypt, crossed the Red Sea, and overcome heathen kings, it was known throughout that region. *“For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye*

which he dried up from before us, until we were gone over: That all the people of the earth might know the hand of the LORD, that it is mighty: that ye might fear the LORD your God for ever” (Josh 4:23-24),

⇨ **THE KINGS OF ISRAEL.** Heathen nations heard about the comparative distinction of *“the kings of the house of Israel.” “And his servants said unto him, Behold now, we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful kings: let us, I pray thee, put sackcloth on our loins, and ropes upon our heads, and go out to the king of Israel: peradventure he will save thy life” (1 Kgs 20:31).*

⇨ **THE FAME OF SOLOMON.** The queen of Sheba heard of the wisdom and wealth of king Solomon. *“And when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the LORD, she came to prove him with hard questions . . . And she said to the king, It was a true report that I heard in mine own land of thy acts and of thy wisdom . . . Howbeit I believed not the words, until I came, and mine eyes had seen it: and, behold, the half was not told me: thy wisdom and prosperity exceedeth the fame which I heard” (1 Kgs 10:1-10).*

⇨ **AT THE BEGINNING OF JESUS' MINISTRY** When Jesus returned from His wilderness temptation, He came in the power of the Spirit, and *“there went out a fame of Him through all the region round about” (Lk 4:14).*

⇨ **WHEN JESUS EXPELLED DEMONS.** When He expelled demons from many, *“the fame of him went out into every place of the country round about” (Luke 4:37).*

⇨ **WHEN JESUS HEALED TEN LEPERS.** When He healed ten lepers, *“so much the more went there a fame abroad of Him” (Lk 5:15).*

- ⇨ **THROUGHOUT JESUS MINISTRY.** During Jesus' prodigious ministry "His fame went throughout all Syria" (Matt 4:24).
- ⇨ **HEROD HEARD OF JESUS.** Herod "heard of the fame of Jesus" (Matt 14:1).
- ⇨ **THE WOMAN WITH THE ISSUE OF BLOOD.** The woman with the issue of blood "heard of Jesus" (Mk 5:27).
- ⇨ **WHEN JESUS RAISED JAIRUS' DAUGHTER.** When Jesus raised the daughter of Jairus from the dead, "the fame hereof went abroad into all that land" (Matt 9:26).
- ⇨ **WHEN JESUS HEALED TWO BLIND MEN.** After Jesus had healed two blind men, they departed and "spread abroad His fame in all that country" (Matt 9:31).
- ⇨ **A CERTAIN CENTURION HEARD OF JESUS.** A certain centurion who sought healing for one of his servants "heard of Jesus" (Lk 7:3).
- ⇨ **THE FATE OF JUDAS.** When the treacherous of Judas resulted him hanging himself, "it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem" (Acts 1:19).
- ⇨ **THE EVENTS OF THE DAY OF PENTECOST.** When the Spirit was given on the day of Pentecost, "this was noised abroad" (Acts 2:6).
- ⇨ **THE JUDGMENT AGAINST ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA.** When Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead for their transgression "great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things" (Acts 5:11).
- ⇨ **THE CONVERSION OF SAMARIA.** When the city of Samaria received the word of God delivered by Philip, "the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard" it (Acts 8:14).
- ⇨ **WHEN PETER RAISED DORCAS.**

When Peter raised Dorcas from the dead, "it was known throughout all Joppa" (Acts 9:42).

- ⇨ **THE FAITH OF THOSE IN ROME.** All of this was more than mere coincidence. The faith of the brethren in Rome was "spoken of throughout the whole world" (Rom 1:8).

Fellowship is small and insignificant by institutional standards, it is widely known throughout the United States, and in foreign countries as well. These include Burkina Faso, Pakistan, India, Myanmar, the Philippines, and others. None of this knowledge was promoted by the fellowship here. All of it is the result of hearing of our faith in Christ and the love possessed for the people of God. It is "the

Men must learn this fact in order to avoid the promotion of self. If God is really working among the people, He will see to it that the word gets out. Men may not receive the report. They may even fight against it. But God's glory will be found where He is working, acknowledged or not!

- ⇨ **THE FAITH AND LOVE OF THE EPHESIANS.** From afar, Paul heard of the faith and love of the Ephesian brethren. "Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints" (Eph 1:15).

fruit of their doings" (Isa 3:10).

Men Must Learn

Men must learn this fact in order to avoid the promotion of self. **If God is really working among the people, He will see to it that the word gets out.** Men may not receive the report. They may even fight against it. But God's glory will be found where He is working, acknowledged or not!

- ⇨ **THE FAITH AND LOVE OF THE COLOSSIANS.** Before he went to Colossae, Paul heard of their "faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love" they had "to all the saints" (Col 1:4).

There are a staggering number of churches that would remain hidden in the dregs of society if they were not promoting themselves. They are not noted for their faith in Christ, or for their love for all saints. They may be noted for their numbers, or for their involvement in the social affairs of the community. However, the kind of reports that are recorded in Scripture are not be given about them.

- ⇨ **THE FAITH OF THE THESSALONIANS.** In the case of the Thessalonian believers, Paul declared their "faith to God-ward is spread abroad" (1 Thess 1:8).

When the focus of the people of God is upon the Lord Himself, and they are growing up into Christ in all things, a work will be done among them that will be reported. That is how the Lord works.

THE NEWS SPREAD RAPIDLY

"And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus..."

None of these reports involved a marketing plan. None of them were designed to promote the individuals or the congregations involved. This is simply the manner of the Kingdom. It is the way God works. This is what Jesus meant when He said, "Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid" (Mat 5:14). **The works of God cannot be hidden or concealed. If men do not see them, it is because they are blind, and do not have eyes to see.**

Our Own Experience

Although The Word of Truth

What a report this was! There is no record that the man with the demon was healed. The report is that a demon

possessed man severely wounded some religious pretenders. **That man, however, did not attack Paul!**

The real contrast here is found in comparing the works of Paul versus the feigned attempts of these Jewish exorcists. On the one hand, handkerchiefs which touched the body of Paul were brought, and *“evil spirits went out”* of those who were oppressed by them (19:12). Now, rather than the evil spirit

This kind of thing has taken place several times among those witnessing the work of the Lord.

- ⇨ Once, when king Saul issued a solemn warning to anyone who refused to come after him and Samuel, *“the fear of the Lord fell on the people”* (1 Sam 11:7).
- ⇨ Another time when the Levites went throughout the land teaching in

In saying the fear *“fell on them,”* or that they were *“seized”* by fear, the point is that this was produced by the very real presence of the Lord. The people were able to associate what was taking place in the remarkable healings, as well as the overthrow of Satan’s workers, with the Lord and His Christ. It was as though the people were afraid to oppose what was being said and done in the name of the Lord.

What Is Happening in Our Time

Under the teaching of the day, a sense of the fear of God has nearly disappeared from the professing church, and thus from society as well. **People are unable to associate what is taking place with the hand of the Lord.** This is wholly owing to the teaching they have willingly accepted. **A God and Christ are being presented that do not induce fear in those who accept it.** As both the Psalmist and Paul wrote, *“There is no fear of God before their eyes”* (Psa 36:1; Rom 3:15).

Just as surely as the fear mentioned in our text was the result of a comprehension of the work of God, so the lack of fear is the result of a **lack** of that comprehension. This condition is the direct result of a false message being delivered. The true God and Jesus Christ His Son are not being proclaimed to the people. It is for this reason that there can be no power in the message, **for the Lord will not undergird a word that is not from Him.** He will not bless what has misrepresented Him.

The *“falling away”* of which Paul spoke is the direct result of delusion (2 Thess 2:3-12). That delusion, according to the Second Thessalonian text, has been mandated by the Lord because men have **not** received *“the love of the truth, that they might be saved”* (2:10). From the standpoint of the hearers themselves, they have fulfilled this word: *“they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears”* (2 Tim 4:3). False teachers have gladly acquiesced to their preferences, delivering a sinner-friendly and worldly-centered message that pacifies the people. All of this also makes for a lucrative career and an impressive organization. **But their approach cannot stem the tide of**

Therefore, the Jewish exorcists were exposed as false, while Paul and his preaching were honored. Even the evil spirit acknowledged that he knew Paul, yet did not recognize the others.

coming out of a man, that spirit moved the one controlled by it to violently and effectively overcome seven men. Thus the validity of Paul’s message was confirmed – for the pretentious exorcism was said to be in the name of Jesus *“whom Paul preacheth.”* Therefore, the Jewish exorcists were exposed as false, while Paul and his preaching were honored. Even the evil spirit acknowledged that he knew Paul, yet did not recognize the others.

This news traveled like a raging fire throughout Ephesus, so that the contrast between Paul and the Jewish exorcists was known to both Jews and Greeks. Paul was vindicated and the exorcists were exposed.

Let me again affirm that ineffective religion is undergirded by a false view of both God and Christ. Further, effective religion is manifested by the exposure of falsehood as well as the confirmation of the truth in those who believe.

FEAR FELL ON THEM

“... and fear fell on them all...”

Other versions read, *“they were seized with fear,”*^{NIV} *“everyone was awestruck,”*^{NRSV} *“fear came on them all,”*^{BBE} *“filled with awe,”*^{NJB} *“a solemn fear descended upon the city,”*^{NLT} *“alarm and terror fell upon them all,”*^{AMPLIFIED} and *“a great sense of awe came over them all.”*^{PHILLIPS}

Judah from the book of the Law, *“the fear of the Lord fell upon the kingdoms of the lands that were round about Judah”* (2 Chron 17:10).

- ⇨ When Israel was delivered from Egypt, *“Egypt was glad . . . for the fear of them fell upon them”* (Psa 105:38).
- ⇨ After the day of Pentecost, as the disciples *“continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in the breaking of bread and in prayers . . . fear came upon every soul”* (Acts 2:43).
- ⇨ When Ananias and Sapphira were judged, *“great fear came on all them that heard these things”* (Acts 5:5), and *“great fear came upon all the church”* (Acts 5:11).
- ⇨ When the early churches experienced a season of rest, they walked *“in the fear of the Lord”* (Acts 9:31).

In this text an acute awareness of the presence of the Lord registered upon the people. This was accented by the impotence of the pretenders as well as the effectiveness of the real message of the Lord and the one who delivered it.

iniquity. It cannot keep sin out of the church. Neither does it produce mature followers who grow up into Christ in all things.

THE NAME OF THE LORD JESUS WAS MAGNIFIED

“. . . and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified.” Other versions read, “was held in high honor,”^{NIV} “was praised,”^{NRSV} “was extolled,”^{RSV} “was made great,”^{BBE} “began to speak very highly about it,”^{GWN} “held in great esteem,”^{NAB} “were giving more and more honor,”^{IE} “extolled and magnified,”^{AMPLIFIED} and “became highly respected.”^{PHILLIPS}

The magnification of the name of Jesus is not only appropriate, it is essential. It is written, “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name” (Phil 2:9). This being true, it is a great sin for men NOT to exalt and magnify the name of Jesus. **By failing to do so, they have set themselves against God, and have thus become His enemy.** For men to live for themselves instead of Christ is wrong in the fullest sense of the word. For them, to ignore the word and work of Jesus in preference for other things is iniquity. When men compare themselves with themselves instead of with Christ, they transgress. When they seek to please men rather than the Lord Jesus who has bought them, they are in the bond of iniquity, and the truth is not in them.

The more men speak insightfully about Jesus, the more it confirms they have really seen something. The more they speak about human organizations and mundane life, the more it confirms they have seen very little of the truth, and perhaps none at all. **If it is true that, as Jesus Himself said, we are sanctified by the truth** (John 17:17,19), **then the less the truth is known, the least apt a person is to be sanctified, or set apart unto God.** No person can belong to the Lord and gain

the advantage from His presence, while living in disassociation from the truth.

The measure of a person or group of persons is largely determined by their knowledge of, and commitment to, the truth as it is in Christ Jesus. If Jesus is, in fact “*THE TRUTH*,” how can it be any other way (John 14:6)? Ponder what is said of the truth.

- ⇨ The knowledge of the hope that is laid up for us is discovered within the context of “*the word of the truth of the Gospel*” (Col 1:5).
- ⇨ Men are saved by means of receiving “*the love of the truth*” (2 Thess 2:10).
- ⇨ Those who do not receive the love of the truth will sent delusion, and

The measure of a person or group of persons is largely determined by their knowledge of, and commitment to, the truth as it is in Christ Jesus.

- ⇨ Knowing the truth makes us free, and is equated with Jesus Himself making us free (John 8:32,35).
- ⇨ If Jesus says the truth, He asks why men do not believe Him (John 8:46).
- ⇨ We are sanctified, or set apart to God and made holy, by the truth (John 17:19).
- ⇨ Everyone who is of the truth hears Christ’s voice (John 18:37).
- ⇨ Indignation and wrath awaits those who do “*not obey the truth*” (Rom 2:8).
- ⇨ True love rejoices in the truth (1 Cor 13:6).
- ⇨ Not obeying the truth is a sign of being bewitched and hindered by other influences (Gal 3:1; 5:7).
- ⇨ Growing up into Christ is contingent upon speaking the truth in love (Eph 4:15).
- ⇨ Jesus teaches men “*as the truth is in Jesus*” (Eph 4:21).

- finally be damned (2 Thess 2:12).
- ⇨ God wills that men be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:4).
- ⇨ The church is “*the pillar and ground of the truth*” (1 Tim 3:15).
- ⇨ Recovery from the snare of the devil is contingent upon acknowledging the truth (2 Tim 2:25).
- ⇨ Not being able to endure sound doctrine is caused by turning away the ears from the truth (2 Tim 4:3-4; Tit 1:14).
- ⇨ The soul is purified by obeying the truth (1 Pet 1:22).

When the name of Jesus is magnified, all of the above things take place in exponential measure. God glorifies Himself and magnifies His Word in this manner. Where Jesus is not magnified, it is not possible for these benefits to be found. That distinction is very real, manifesting who believes the truth and who does not. When God is not glorified, it is only because He has not been believed.

WHEN SINNERS SHOWED THEIR DEEDS

¹⁸ **“And many that believed came, and confessed, and showed their deeds.”**

When the truth is received, things begin to happen that could not otherwise take place. Further, the

reception of truth, particularly initially, is always associated with some proclaimer – someone who has been sent to “*preach.*”

Paul expressed it this way: *“How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!”* (Rom 10:14-15). Further confirming this to be the mode of the Kingdom Paul wrote, *“Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?”* (1 Cor 3:5).

had faith, ^{BBE} *“earlier made professions of faith,”* ^{CJB} *“were now believers,”* ^{AMPLIFIED} *“had professed their faith,”* ^{PHILLIPS} and *“who were followers.”* ^{CEV}

The term *“believers,”* and the expression *“believed,”* are often used to describe those who receive Christ as the Gospel declares Him (Acts 2:44; 4:4,32; 5:14; 8:12,13; 9:42; 10:46; 11:17,21; 13:12, 8; 14:1,23; 15:5; 16:1; 17:4,12,34; 18:8,27; 19:18; 22:19; 28:24; Rom 4:3,17,18; 13:11; 1 Cor 3:5; 15:2,11; Gal 2:16; 3:6; Eph 1:13; 2 Thess 1:10; 1 Tim 3:16; 2 Tim 1:12; Tit 3:8; Heb 4:3; James 2:23; 1 John 4:16).

This particular text reports a most extraordinary phenomenon. Many who believed were on the initiative to do something. There is no indication that they had to be exhorted or admonished to do this. They were rather driven from within, being made willing in the day of God’s power.

In the text before us, the proclaimer was Paul, and the place in which he was declaring and expounding *“the things concerning the kingdom of God,”* was Ephesus – in particular, the school of Tyrannus (Acts 19:8-10). People apparently came from various regions in Asia to hear him, and carried the word back to their homeland. Additionally, some had also brought handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched the body of Paul, and wrought many miracles. Those miracles are said to have been wrought *“by the hands of Paul.”* The text suggests that these took place throughout Asia, as well as in the city of Ephesus itself.

Now, our attention is turned specifically to the city of Ephesus. As I have said, the text suggests that the *“special miracles”* were also occurring in Ephesus, as Paul continued there for the space of two years in his powerful daily ministry.

MANY THAT BELIEVED

“ . . . And many that believed came . . . ” Other versions read, *“who had believed,”* ^{NKJV} *“who became believers,”* ^{NRSV} *“who were now believers,”* ^{RSV} *“who*

The Gentile church has greatly minimized believing, both by neglecting a proper emphasis of it, and by distorting what it really means to believe. This departure from the truth has been so pronounced that religious men rarely speak about faith, and when they do, they do not give to it the value assigned by the Spirit of God. Whether wittingly or unwittingly men are exalting above faith such things as, fasting, obedience, various outward disciplines, and supposed success in this present evil world.

There is a pronounced absence of such accents in the Scriptures. Here, in the book of Acts, a report is given of the impact of the truth upon the hearts of men. Some became more hostile than they ever were before. Others yielded to the Lord, withholding nothing from Him. This particular text reports a most extraordinary phenomenon. Many who believed were on the initiative to do something. There is no indication that they had to be exhorted or admonished to do this. They were rather driven from within, being made willing in the day of God’s power (Psa 110:3). This is

something that was done publically.

CONFESSED AND SHOWED THEIR DEEDS

“ . . . and confessed, and showed their deeds.” Other versions read, *“came confessing and telling their deeds,”* ^{NKJV} *“kept coming, confessing and disclosing their practices,”* ^{NASB} *“came and openly confessed their evil deeds,”* ^{NIV} *“confessing and divulging their practices,”* ^{RSV} *“made a public statement of their sins and all their acts,”* ^{BBE} *“came and admitted publicly their evil deeds,”* ^{CJB} *“openly admitted their involvement with magical spells and told all the details,”* ^{GWN} *“came and narrated their faults, and confessed what they had done,”* ^{MRD} *“began to admit all of the evil things they had done,”* ^{IE} *“came confessing without reserve what their conduct had been,”* ^{MONTGOMERY} *“kept coming and confessing and uncovering their former practices,”* ^{WILLIAMS} and *“came making full confession and thoroughly exposing their [former deceptive and evil] practices,”* ^{AMPLIFIED}

The actions here described were prompted by the fear of God. Such a response shows the powerful effects of witnessing the works of God, beholding with insight the overthrow of the devil, and believing the Gospel. At the threshold of human history, when sin first entered into the world, a confrontation by God Himself did **not** produce such marvelous results. When God asked Adam, *“Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?”* (Gen 3:11), Adam replied, *“The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat”* (Gen 3:12). When God asked Eve, *“What is this that thou hast done?”* the woman replied, *“The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat”* (Gen 3:13). Both Adam and confessed *“I did eat,”* but they also offered an excuse for their action. **That was proof that in the very day that ate of the forbidden tree they did, in fact, “die,” just as the Lord said they would** (Gen 2:17).

Now, however, a greater light had come into the world – greater than the light of a prohibition. People from Ephesus stepped forward, confessed their sin, and *“disclosed their practices.”* ^{NASB} They offered no excuse for what they had been doing.

The ministry of John the Baptist produced similar results among the Jews. It is said of those who responded favorably to his word, “*And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins*” (Matt 3:6). Here, however, it appears as though the people went even further. They not only “*confessed*” to their wrongdoing, but “*showed their deeds*,” bringing forth some evidence of what they were renouncing.

I have observed a marked decline in this kind of practice over the past few decades. **Sin is not generally treated with the kind of seriousness reported in this text.** In fact, it is often glossed as though it did not even occur. In my judgment, this trend is the direct result of flawed preaching and teaching. What is currently in vogue in the Christian community is much the same as took place in the Corinthian defection. There is the presentation of “*another*

Jesus,” “*another spirit*,” and “*another gospel*” (2 Cor 11:4). I am persuaded this is the case because the kind of results that are staring us in the face are not what is produced by the real Jesus, the real Spirit, and the real Gospel. What is taking place in our day needs to be compared with the inspired report of the impact of “*sound doctrine*” – the preaching of Christ, and expounding things concerning the kingdom of God. That comparison will produce a certain sobriety in the people.

NOTHING REALLY IS LOST WHEN SIN IS ABANDONED

“¹⁹ Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver.”

Some details are now provided concerning what was publically confessed, and the deeds that were openly shown. As we will see, they were directly related to the demonic world, and the spiritual darkness with which the people had been confronted when the demon possessed man attacked and overcame the pretending Jewish exorcists. The public nature of what was done is worthy of note. **It confirms the nature of genuine conversion, and the forwardness of real repentance.** In such responses glory is brought to God, and He is justified in what He has said concerning the change He works within those who believe.

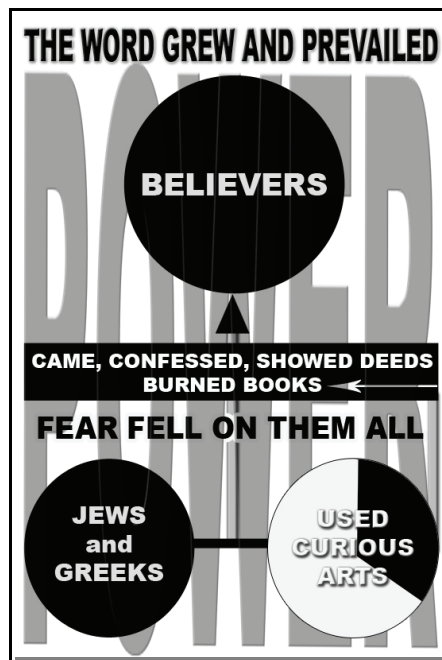
MANY OF THEM ALSO

“*Many of them also . . .*” Other versions read, “*a number*,”^{NIV} “*not a few of them*,”^{ASV} “*a great number*,”^{BBE} “*a considerable number*,”^{CJB} “*a large number*,”^{NAB} and “*large numbers*.”^{NET}

There are two ways to take this text.

⇨ That a significant number of those who confessed their sins and showed their deeds were in the category now mentioned. Versions that represent this view are The Living Bible (“*Many of the believers who had been practicing*”); International English

(“*Many of the believers*”); Weymouth



(“*many of those also who believed*”); Williams (“*Many who became believers*”); Montgomery (“*Many also of those who became believers*”); The Amplified Bible (“*Many of those also who were now believers*”); and Phillips (“*Many of those who had professed their faith*”).

⇨ A considerable number of those who had been practicing the particular transgression mentioned came, confessed, and showed their deeds. All of the Standard versions give this view, and most of the other versions

as well: i.e. “*Many of those who had practiced . . .*”

The meaning of the text is that of those who were practicing the particular sin that is mentioned, a large number renounced that practice. In other words, considerable inroads were made in that spiritually aberrant section of society. Where Satan was apparently maintaining a stronghold a devastating and crippling blow was struck. The means through which this was accomplished was the daily reasoning and persuading of Paul “*concerning the kingdom of God*” (19:9). In other words, the light of spiritual knowledge, or illumination, was dissipating the power of darkness.

CURIOUS ARTS

“*. . . which used curious arts . . .*” Other versions read, “*practiced magic*,”^{NKJV} “*practiced sorcery*,”^{NIV} “*practiced magical arts*,”^{ASV} “*experts in strange arts*,”^{BBE} “*engaged in occult practices*,”^{CJB} “*involved in the occult*,”^{GWN} “*used curious arts*,”^{NT} “*had been practicing black magic*,”^{LIVING} and “*practicing witchcrafts*.”^{CEV}

As used here, the words “*curious arts*” are translated from a single Greek word (περίεργα) meaning, “*impertinent and superfluous, of magic (A. V., curious) arts*,”^{THAYER} “*of things intriguing, curious; neuter plural τὰ περίεργα as a substantive magic arts, sorcery, witchcraft*,”^{FRIEBERG} “*witchcraft*,”^{LOUW-NIDA} and “*magic*.”^{GINGRICH}

The expression “*curious arts*” carries the meaning of “*busy with trifles and neglectful of important matters*.”^{THAYER} From an

CONCERNING CURIOUS ARTS

“Arts or practices requiring skill, address, cunning. The word used here περιεργα denotes properly “those things that require care or skill,” and was thus applied to the arts of “magic, jugglery, and sleight of hand” that were practiced so extensively in Eastern countries. That such arts were practiced at Ephesus is well known. The Ephesian letters, by which incantations and charms were supposed to be produced, were much celebrated. They seem to have consisted of certain combinations of letters or words, which, by being pronounced with certain intonations of voice, were believed to be effectual in expelling diseases, or evil spirits; or which, by being written on parchment and worn, were supposed to operate as amulets, or charms, to guard from evil spirits or from danger.” JOHN CALVIN

illuminated point of view, this means that such activities are bringing no genuine advantage, but can, at the very best, deal with secondary and inconsequential matters. While such activeness is often nothing more than a delusion, that is not necessarily the case all of the time. **There is a dark world that deals in matters that transcend natural human aptitude.** The activities of demons confirm this to be the case. Some representatives of that number caused a man to become like a wild beast, running and shrieking through the country, and cutting himself. He also became extraordinarily strong, breaking both chains and shackles (Mk 5:4). Demons have also imposed upon men deafness and dumbness (Mk 9:25), blindness and dumbness (Matt 12:22), violent seizures (Matt 17:14-18; Mk 9:17-27; Lk 9:37-42), and a condition in which a woman was bowed together for eighteen years (Lk 13:11).

Under the Law, consultation with evil spirits and the practice of sorcery and witchcraft were strictly forbidden. This included “*familiar spirits*” and “*wizards that peep and that mutter*” (Isa 8:19). Other versions refer to consulting with “*mediums and the spiritists who whisper and mutter.*”^{NASB} **The point of condemnation was that**

the people did not seek to acquire knowledge from their God. Rather, they chose to consult with members of Satan’s empire. Thus God reasons, “And when they say to you, *“should not a people consult their God? Should they consult the dead on behalf of the living?”* (Isa 8:19).

Of those who engaged in such activity the Lord said, “*And the soul that turneth after such as have familiar spirits, and after wizards, to go a whoring after them, I will even set My face against that soul, and will cut him off from among his people*” (Lev 20:6). And again, “*There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer*” (Deu 18:10-11). The Lord also referred to one who had a familiar spirit, who spoke out of the ground (Isa 29:4).

Men may banter about whether or not supernatural things really were wrought by these spirits. However, if this was not the case, I cannot conceive of why God would speak as He did about them. **The point is that consultation with such alien spirits is an unlawful means of appropriating knowledge.** Whatever is made known by them will not bring eternal advantage to the soul, but will cause God to be against the person who sought such knowledge. Various modern day forms of this kind of knowledge include horoscopes, palm-readers, psychics, astrology, psychiatry, phrenology (study of the skull as a means of determining human behavior), acupuncture, hypnosis, necromancy (conjuring up the souls of the dead), witchcraft, etc.

At any rate, the teaching of Paul, together with the exposure of the powerlessness of spurious religion, convicted these people of their sin, and they came forward confessing they had been wrong, and unveiling their works.

THEY BURNED THEIR BOOKS

“*...brought their books together, and burned them before all men . . .*” Other versions read, “*and began burning them in the sight of all,*”^{NASB} “*burned them*

publicly,”^{NIV} “*put them on the fire in front of everyone,*”^{BBE} and “*collected their books and [throwing them, book after book, on the pile] burned them in the sight of everybody.*”^{AMPLIFIED}

This was bringing forth fruits “*meet for repentance*” (Matt 3:8). **The conversion of these people was genuine, and therefore there was a change in their conduct.** This is what happens under the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit (John 16:8-11). Here was a total renunciation of a former manner of life in which an unlawful body of knowledge had been sought. Gathering together the books having to do with this realm of knowledge, the people put them in a heap and burned them publicly.

This would be something like a group of people converted from the rock-and-roll generation burning all of their recorded media. Or, a group of psychics burning the literature pertaining to that field. I can even conceive of a body of men converted from the field of psychiatry burning all of their literature, or some turning to Christ from the embrace of evolution gathering their books together and burning them. Of course, such actions would be viewed as extremely radical in this day of loose theology. However, in the book of Acts we are reading of real conversions.

My Own Experience

Back in the early seventies, we experienced an incident in the congregation in Indiana – then known as “The Church at 78th and Independence.” One of our sons (not by flesh and blood), whom we had raised from a young age, converted a young lady who had been raised by a family devoted to occultism. She had absolutely no exposure to the teaching of Christ prior to that time, and was now a fervent disciple of the Lord. She gathered all of her occultic books and brought them to a week-night gathering of the saints, determined to burn them all. We had an area outside the building where this could be done, and soon the burning commenced. There were a considerable number of books on the heap. Having started the fire, we observed that it swirled around the books, yet was not actually burning any of them. Angered by the whole circumstance, our daughter-in-law took hold of a rake, and

began to open the books one by one, causing a page at a time to burn. As she continued in this activity, the books finally caught on fire, and the whole of them was burned into a heap of ashes. Afterward she said she was determined not to allow Satan to have his way in the matter. She had been consumed with the zeal of the Lord, and was resolute in her renunciation of what she then saw as a false and damning body of knowledge. I shall never forget that blessed occasion, which brought great rejoicing to all who were present.

Our Time

Considering the days in which we are living, and the false and corrupt literature that is pervading society, one might expect there would be a lot of book burning like that which took place in Ephesus. However, this is not at all the case – as least we are not hearing any reports of such activity. **It seems to me that a kind of gospel is being preached that causes such accounts to appear strange.** If a time should come when genuine conversions take place on any scale of largeness, events like that described in our text will take place.

THEY COUNTED THE PRICE

“... and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver.” Other versions read, “about two million dollars [\$9,900,000 in 2009],”

IE-1973] “\$10,000” [\$52,800 in 2009] LIVING-1971 “ten thousand dollars.” [\$150,200 in 2009] WILLIAMS-1937 “fifty thousand drachmas. (A drachma was a silver coin worth about a day’s wages @ \$48 daily = \$2,400,000” [\$5,000,000 in 2009], NIB-1984 “several million dollars,” NLT-2004 “about \$9,300 [\$72,726 in 2009]. AMPLIFIED-1954

VERSION	VALUE IN VERSION YEAR	VALUE IN 2009
Williams – 1937	\$10,000	\$150,200
Amplified Bible – 1954	\$9,300	\$72,726
Living Bible – 1971	\$10,000	\$52,800
International English– 1973	\$2,000,000	\$9,900,000
New International Bible– 1984	\$2,400,000	\$5,000,000

As you can see, there is by no means unanimity on the amount of money intended by the expression – but the books were of considerable value. The represented least value, as of 2009, would be \$52,800, and the most \$9,900,000. If Judas objected to pouring out ointment on Jesus that was valued at a year’s wages

(for comparison purposes, \$30,000), what would he have said about the burning of these books? A modern Christian might say the books could have been sold and the funds procured given to missions.

Yet, in the view of these people, the burning of their books was a gain, not a loss. It constituted the removal of temptation, deliverance from the unlawful and inferior, and a sacrifice that was willingly offered in thanksgiving to God. Whatever is put away in deference to the obtaining of salvation is not a painful loss. What is obtained in redemption constitutes a far greater gain than what must be abandoned to appropriate it. **It is never wrong to leave the inferior in preference for the superior; to abandon what is defiled to appropriate what is pure; and to give up what is passing away for what is eternal.**

Those who accent life in this world are not to be allowed places of leadership in the body of Christ – all of their imagined credentials notwithstanding. It is time for the professed church to exclude all priorities that do not have to do with fighting the good fight of faith and laying hold on eternal life. If that requires a massive burning of some sort, then let it be so!

WHEN THE WORD OF GOD GREW AND PREVAILED

“²⁰ So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.”

SO

“So . . .” Other versions read, “in this way,” NIV “Thus,” CJB “In this powerful way,” GWN “This indicates,” LIVING, “This is how,” IE and “In a way of just such power.” WILLIAMS

What has just been reported is a sampling of what took place during the two years Paul taught in the school of Tyrannus. **I gather that the exposition of the kingdom of God, together with the hearty acceptance of the message provided an environment in which the Lord was**

pleased to work in an unusual way. If Jesus “could do no mighty work” where unbelief was prevalent (Mk 6:5), what can be said of an environment in which faith is prominent?

MIGHTILY GREW THE WORD

“... mightily grew the word of God . . .” Other versions read, “growing mightily,” NASB “spread widely,” NIV “increased very greatly,” BBE “continued in a powerful way,” CJB “flourished,” CSB “,” GWN “spread more and more widely,” NJB “spread widely,” NLT “This indicates how deeply the whole area was stirred by God’s message,” LIVING “was influencing more and more people,” IE “mightily did the Lord’s Message spread,” WEYMOUTH

“grew and spread and intensified,” AMPLIFIED and “continued to grow.” PHILLIPS

The same kind of expression is found in Acts 12:24. Herod had just been smitten by an angel, and died when “he was eaten of worms.” Immediately following that occasion it is written, “But the word of God grew and multiplied” (Acts 12:24).

The Word of God grew in this manner. It was powerfully preached and heartily received. **People turned from their wicked ways, openly confessed their deeds, and separated themselves from defiling influences.** They willingly gave up their former evil

occupations, and discarded everything associated with their former previous manner of life. The attention of the people was turned to the Word of God, and it was given prominence in their lives. Men began to live "by every word of God" (Lk 4:4), which was working "effectually" in them (1 Thess 2:13).

afar off, being persuaded of them, and embracing them (Heb 11:13). It is written that they were **not** made perfect without us, for whom God provided "some **better thing**" (Heb 11:39-40). **Yet, in both their understanding and commitment they were light years ahead of the average American Christian.** What further compounds the

said of them, "For the LORD hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes: the prophets and your rulers, the seers hath he covered. And the vision of all is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one that is learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I cannot; for it is sealed: And the book is delivered to him that is not learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I am not learned" (Isa 29:12). God has so impacted the understanding of the religious leaders that they cannot comprehend what He has said in His Word. Their professed field of expertise is not the Word, because they have been blinded to it. We are living in the midst of the fulfillment of the prophesy of Amos. "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD: And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the LORD, and shall not find it. In that day shall the fair virgins and young men faint for thirst" (Amos 8:11-13).

Whatever the word of God confronted, whether Jewish tradition, or members of the occult in Ephesus, it overcame and prevailed. That is, people were more apt to believe the Word of God than the opposing views to which they were subjected.

The Stark Contrast of Our Time

Even though, by reason of both time and the nature of Kingdom life, the Word of God should be pervasive throughout our nation, as well as the rest of the world, that is not at all the case. God revealed to Nebuchadnezzar the nature of the Kingdom He would set up on the earth. It would begin small, but eventually fill the whole earth, prevailing over all other kingdoms (Dan 2:35-45).

Unless you go back to the Dark Ages, it will be difficult to identify a time when the ignorance of the Word of God was ever as prevalent as it is today. It is steadily decreasing, and the attention of professing Christians is being turned to other things. **Whatever is being preached, it has not induced a hearty appetite for the Word of God.** Job, who lived in spiritually primitive times once said, "I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food" (Job 23:12). David, who lived over 3,000 years ago said, "How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" (Psa 119:103). And again, "Therefore I love thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold" (Psa 119:127). Jeremiah, who lived around 2,500 years ago said, "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O LORD God of hosts" (Jer 15:16). Such men are described by the Holy Spirit as dying in the faith, NOT receiving the promises, yet seeing them

problem is that these second-rate and uninformed Christians are evangelizing the world, spreading their mediocrity to other continents.

Is it all something innocent? Indeed, it is not! God has divulged **more** of Himself, His mind, and His purpose in Christ Jesus. He has poured forth His Spirit in an abundant measure on those who believe the Gospel (Tit 3:5-6), which is His power unto salvation (Rom 1:16). He has given believers His grace to effectively teach them to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, and to look for the return of Jesus – the "blessed hope" of the church (Tit 2:11-13). The "whole armor of God" has been provided that enables the believer to stand against the wiles of the devil (Eph 6:10-18), and a spiritual arsenal has been supplied that is "mighty through God" (2 Cor 10:3-5).

What reason can be adduced for a weak and uninformed church?

How can men explain why sin is so pervasive in the church? Why isn't the Word of God prevailing instead of psychiatry, humanly developed plans, and religious tradition? Why?

If my assessment is correct, I fear the modern church is under the judgment of God, just as Israel was when they embraced tradition and lifeless religion. It is

It may sound radical and depressing to say such things. But if this is not the truth, then the nature of the Kingdom of God has changed, and the power of the Word is no longer present. If what I have said is not true, then the Word has ceased to work effectually in those who believe. In such a case, the grace of God has ceased to teach men (Tit 2:11-12), and the Holy Spirit no longer is leading men to mortify the deeds of the body (Rom 8:13). The Spirit has, then, ceased to change men from glory to glory, conforming them to the image of Jesus (Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18; 4:6). **Who would dare to postulate such absurdities?**

AND PREVAILED

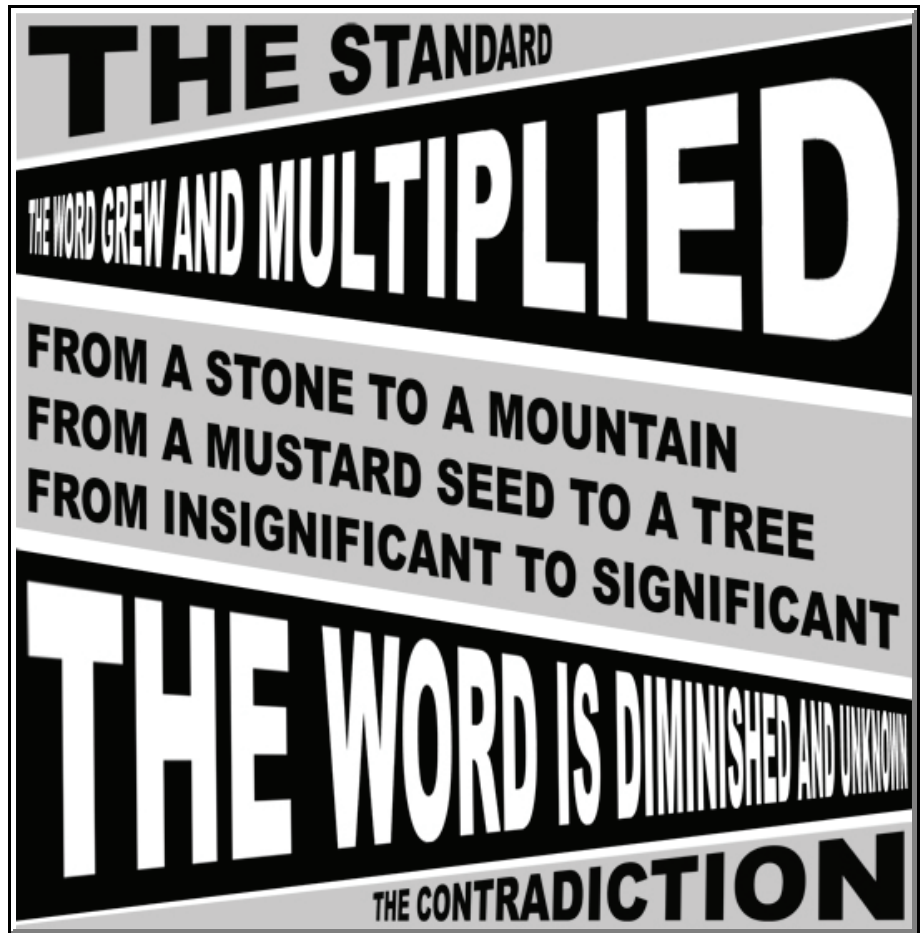
" . . . and prevailed." Other versions read, "and prevailing,"^{NASB} "and grew in power,"^{NIV} "and was full of power,"^{BBE} "continued in a powerful way,"^{CJB} "and was confirmed,"^{DOUAY} "gaining strength,"^{GWN} "and successfully,"^{NJB} "and had a powerful effect,"^{NLT} "the whole area was stirred by God's message,"^{LIVING} "in a powerful way,"^{IE} "and triumph!",^{WEYMOUTH} "prevailing mightily,"^{AMPLIFIED} and "and influence."^{PHILLIPS}

Whatever the word of God confronted, whether Jewish tradition, or members of the occult in Ephesus, it overcame and prevailed. That is, people were more apt to believe the Word of God than the opposing views to which they were subjected. That is a circumstance much to be coveted in our time.

Albert Barnes suggests this verse implies the following. They are good practical observations.

- (1) That religion has power to break the hold of sinners on unjust and dishonest means of living.
- (2) That those who have been engaged in an unchristian and dishonorable practice will abandon it when they become Christians.
- (3) That their abhorrence of their former course will be, and ought to be, expressed as publicly as was the offence.
- (4) That the evil practice will be abandoned at any sacrifice, however great. The question will be, what is right; not what will it cost. Property, in the view of a converted man, is nothing when compared with a good conscience.
- (5) This conduct of those who had used curious arts shows us what ought to be done by those who have been engaged in any evil course of life and who are then converted. ALBERT BARNES, COMMENTARY ON ACTS

It is true that a tree is known by its fruit, and that even men are known by their fruits, or the results of what they preach and teach. Thus Jesus said, *“Beware of false prophets, who come to you dressed as sheep, but inside they are devouring wolves. [Ezek. 22:27.] You will fully recognize them by their fruits. Do people pick grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles Even so, every healthy (sound) tree bears good fruit [worthy of admiration], but the sickly (decaying, worthless) tree bears bad (worthless) fruit. A good (healthy) tree cannot bear bad (worthless) fruit, nor can a bad (diseased) tree bear excellent fruit [worthy of admiration]. Every tree that*



does not bear good fruit is cut down and cast into the fire. Therefore, you will fully know them by their fruits”^{AMPLIFIED} (Matt 7:15-20). This being true, it seems to me that we must insist on examining what is produced by the doctrines to which we are exposed. If this is not the case, then what can be the meaning of Christ’s words?

It is to be understood that when the Gospel is believed, and the obedience of faith follows, the individuals will make voluntary adjustments in their lives. A salvation that does not effect a change of life is no salvation at all. That would be like Israel being delivered from Egypt yet remaining in it. When Saul of Tarsus was converted, He ceased persecuting the church. It is

true that some must be exhorted to make the changes – like the admonition to certain in Ephesus: *“Let him that stole, steal no more”* (Eph 4:28). All believers are exhorted, *“Mortify therefore your members that are upon the earth”* (Col 3:5), and *“let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God”* (2 Cor 7:1).

And why is this the case? Because the wine of the newness of life cannot be poured into the old life. It cannot be contained in a manner of living that is in synch with the world, from which Jesus has delivered us. All religion that allows for, or excuses, deviate conduct, is to be forthrightly abandoned.

CONCLUSION

Our text has exposed us to certain things about Satan’s kingdom. **First**, it does not yield to powerless

religion or religious pretension. The devil and his hosts are actually invincible when confronted with a religion that is not

rooted in a very real identity with the Lord Jesus Christ. Men may develop systems to alter human behavior, but

when that behavior is governed by the powers of darkness, human procedures are impotent.

Second, when anyone hears and believes the Gospel of Christ, yielding the obedience of faith, they can make a clean exit from the worst of intellectual and emotional falsehood. When the Ephesians who were devoted to “*curious*

arts” gathered their books together, all the powers of darkness could not hinder them. Further, the Word of God grew in its influence, and prevailed over all competing powers. Satan and his hosts could not stop the preaching or the spread of the Word of God. A territory over which he had apparently exercised dominion for some time was invaded, and he was

powerless to stop that invasion.

Can such things happen in our day and time? There is no need to spend time speculating and philosophizing about it. The truth of the Gospel is confirmed in the crucible of conflict among those who believe it and respond to it accordingly.

Our next Hungry Saints Meeting will be held on Friday, 7/31/09. We will continue our current series of lessons on the book of Acts. The Eightieth lesson will cover verses 21 through 29 of the nineteenth chapter: “DEMETRIUS CAUSES TROUBLE” This text confirms that the invasion, so to speak, of the Gospel, agitates those who are given to falsehood. They will do anything in their power to stop the spread of the Gospel, because it is a clear threat to them and their way of life. Our meeting will begin at 7:00 P.M. You are invited to bring your family and friends for fellowship around the Word of God. Refreshments are served afterward, with a time of extended fellowship for everyone.

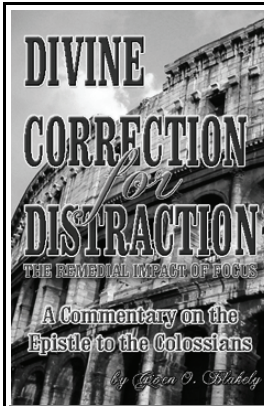
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406 South Sergeant Street, Joplin, MO 64801

Telephone: (417) 782-3063, Email: Given (GivenB@aol.com) June: (JuneE01@aol.com)

ADAH's Webpage: <http://wotruth.com/adah.htm> -- EVA's Webpage: <http://wotruth.com/Eva.htm>

Benjamin (Bensvison@aol.com), Eva (Evablakely@aol.com)

Adah Hutchcraft (adahhutchcraft@hotmail.com), Jason Hutchcraft (hutchcraftj@hotmail.com)

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These broadcasts provide the audience with exposure to the various ministries and individuals of The Word of Truth Fellowship. Messages, provocative spiritual thoughts, and Lord's Table meditations are presented with unusual insight.

The Word of Truth radio broadcast has been designed for several notable purposes. **First**, it introduces the community to what is regularly taught in our fellowship. A number of misconceptions exist concerning this group of believers that have resulted from erroneous and malicious statements made by those with no understanding. Unlike those who oppose us, we are forward to both publish and air our focus, and precisely what we teach. For those with honest and good hearts, it will be apparent that we proclaim nothing that has not been held by believers in Christ throughout the ages. Also, what we declare is for all men, not a segment of them. The radio broadcast features young and old speakers, male and female, leaders and followers. Brief, but concise, presentations are provided, as well as extensive expositions Scripture. In all of these our focus can be clearly seen, and that we have not adopted any agenda foreign to the revealed will of God.

Second, it is our aim to set before the community what any assembly of believers is capable of doing. As the body of Christ, both on an assembly level, and a global level, the gathering of those who are believing in Jesus is designed to work together for the common good of those present. No member of Christ is a nonparticipant, and all members are designed to function in a manner that is complementary to the rest of the body. No person who has seen the truth is forbidden to speak it. When it comes to the body of Christ, the Head of the church has not excluded any member of that body from speaking to the edifying of the whole.

Third, we see a serious need to clear the air of some of fictitious teaching that has its genesis in the minds of mere mortals. There are erroneous emphases that are to be cast down, for they are bastions of thought that will subvert the hearers. Such error can, and must be, dismantled with the spiritual weaponry that we have been given in Christ Jesus. This must be done in a manner that does not reproach Christ or endanger His people.

"The Lord gave the word: great was the company of those that published it." (Psa 68:11)