



The Choices We Make

By D. L. Stephens

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Recently, when I stopped at KFC for some chicken I asked for 6 wings and some bites. The clerk told me that the wings were \$1.63 apiece. I said ok. Then after thinking about the choices they offer, I asked, “Could I get the wings for less?”

“Yes, you can,” he replied. “But you will have to buy two 3-piece wing snacks.”

“How much will I save?”

“A little over \$2.”

So I bought two 3-piece wing snacks, and I saved \$2 and got two biscuits into the bargain.

Now this was a choice I did not realize I had—until I asked.

Sometimes you have to ask. Sometimes we should ask and we don’t. Then we wind up in sin. The choice of what kind of chicken to buy is not exactly trivial, but it must be ranked down the list of importance. There are some choices that involve life and death.

There is the story about Melissa Smart of Denver, Colorado. Three months after she learned that she was pregnant she found out that she had breast cancer. Doctors told her that the cancer had spread to her lymphatic system. She had a ten percent chance to live five years. They said she would have to undergo intense radiation treatment in order to have any chance to life, but that would also mean she would have to abort her pregnancy.

Faced with a life and death choice Melissa chose to bear the child. She gave birth to the baby, Michelle Elizabeth, and then died 18 days later.

Regrettably, she was not married. Her "boyfriend," John Eger, and the baby's father, said, "That baby meant everything in the world to her."¹

¹ The Tampa Tribune, September 29, 1995.

Melissa made a difficult choice. Many people face dilemmas of the same kind.

Sam Davis, of Tennessee made a difficult choice. He was a Confederate soldier captured by the Union Army and placed on trial for his life. They gave him the choice to expose the officer in charge of Confederate intelligence efforts, or of death. He chose death rather than betray his friends.

Every day a person makes choices. Every day they say and do things that affect their course in life. It might mean a few extra biscuits, or it might mean your life.

The Bible says that a day came when King David choose to number the people of Israel, but he knew he had done something wrong.

2 Samuel 24:10 Now David's heart troubled him after he had numbered the people. So David said to the Lord, "I have sinned greatly in what I have done. But now, O Lord, please take away the iniquity of your servant, for I have acted very foolishly." 11 when David arose in the morning, the word of the Lord came to the prophet Gad, David's seer, saying, 12 "Go and speak to David, 'Thus the Lord says, "I am offering you three things; choose for yourself one of them, which I will do to you." ' " 13 So Gad came to David and told him, and said to him, Shall seven years of famine come to you in your land? Or will you flee three months before your foes while they pursue you? Or shall there be three days' pestilence in your land? Now consider and see what answer I shall return to him who sent me." 14 Then David said to Gad, "I am in great distress. Let us now fall into the hand of the Lord for his mercies are great, but do not let me fall into the hand of man."

People who rebel against God and commit sin wind up in suffering. David should have known and he should have asked. But the better choice was as David himself said, “Let us now fall into the hand of the Lord for his mercies are great.”

So the Lord sent a pestilence and 70,000 men died.

Sometimes the choices a man makes cause repercussions to fall on people who had no influence on his decision. Such was the case with King David and the numbering of Israel.

The Old Testament tells us that God delivered the children of Israel out of Egyptian bondage. Then a day came when the children of Israel stood on the banks of the Red Sea. Before them lay the waters of a sea that they could neither swim nor go around. Behind them the Pharaoh came with his army and his chariots. The Israelites faced a bitter choice – at least, as they saw it. The Bible says,

Exodus 14:9 then the Egyptians chased after them with all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, his horsemen and his army, and they overtook them camping by the sea, beside pi-hahiroth, in front of Baal-Zephon. 10 as Pharaoh drew near, the sons of Israel looked, and behold, the Egyptians were marching after them, and they became very frightened; so the sons of Israel cried out to the Lord. 11 then they said to Moses, “Is it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? Why have you dealt with us in this way, bringing us out of Egypt? 12 “Is this not the word that we spoke to you in Egypt, saying, ‘Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians’? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.”

Many of them saw their choices as: remain in Egypt as slaves, or follow Moses and die in the wilderness.

The Israelites greatly feared the Egyptian army. They also feared drowning in the Red Sea. But God chose a path of safety for Israel through the Red Sea. It was as David said, “Let us now fall into the hand of the Lord for his mercies are great.”

God’s choices are not always what we expect. But they are choices that have our best interest in mind. God gave Israel a choice after they had come out of Egypt—after they had received the law.

In Deut. 30:15 God told Israel,

15 “See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, and death and adversity; ... 19 “I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants,

Just as Israel had a choice, God has given all of mankind the power of choice. God has no policeman to go around and grab us by the neck and say you must read your Bible, or you must go to church, or you must give to the poor. When God created man, he gave man the power of choice. He does not force us to choose one way or the other. But whichever we choose there are consequences. We have the responsibility to abide by the results or consequences of our choices.

In Matthew Chapter 7 Jesus told the multitude that they had before them two gates, one of them wide and the other narrow. Then he told them they had a choice.

Matthew 7:13 “Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. 4 “For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

As in all of life there are choices and there are consequences. If you choose the wide gate and the broad way you will find that you have a lot of company, but that your choice leads to destruction. The other choice is better—in the long run. Even though in the short run there are troubles.

In Matthew Chapter 7 the Lord told his disciples about the two trees and their fruits

Matthew 7:15 the Lord said, “Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. 16 “You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? 17 “So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 “A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. 19 “Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 “So then, you will know them by their fruits.

A headline in an article on the Business Insider magazine said, “A shocking number of Americans don’t believe in evolution.”

Shocking.

The article said that a “...third of Americans reject the idea of evolution.” In the new Pew Research Center poll the researchers found that a majority of white evangelical protestants (64%) and Republicans (57%) did not believe in evolution. That means one in three Americans would agree that "...humans and other living things have existed in their present form since the beginning of time.“

I would argue that a third of Americans have made the right choice and have rejected the false prophets.

Regrettably, two-thirds of them have not.

Aside from the arguments about science it is clear that the belief in evolution should be rejected because of the fruit it bears.

Evolution is Godless. Does it help a person to believe there is no God? Romans Chapter One answers that question and the answer is “no.” The writer of the Psalms said that it is the fool who believes that there is no God.²

Man without the guidance of God is lost.

The basis of evolution is the philosophy of materialism, the idea that nothing exists except matter and its forces. To an evolutionist this idea is self-evident, apparently, since there is no experiment to prove that nothing exists except matter and its forces. It is an assumption. The idea is the evolutionist’s foundation postulate; i.e., his basic assumption, or premise which he assumes to be true. He makes this assumption in the face of obvious signs of creation.³

No one has ever conducted a successful scientific experiment showing that life arises from non-living matter. Experiments attempting to show that one created kind evolves into another distinct created kind have failed. Therefore, the wise choice is creation.

To refuse the knowledge of God and to choose instead to deny God’s sovereign power or His very existence leads to the worship of nature, degrading passions, and to a depraved mind.

Choices do have consequences.

At the beginning of the 1900s, two young Russian Jews were invited to a noonday service in a little church in New York City. One of them, Abraham Silverstein, accepted the invitation. He heard the gospel, accepted Christ, and became a missionary to the Jews. The other young man, known later as Leon Trotsky, refused to accept Christ. He returned to Russia and dedicated his life to atheistic communism. Ultimately he fell into

² Psalm 14:1.

³ Romans 1:18-21.

disfavor with the communist party, fled from Russia to Mexico, and was murdered there in 1940.

Our choices do have consequences.

George Orwell expressing a dilemma he had seen for some time, knew that man's central problem was the death of Christian belief. In 1944 he wrote, "Since about 1930 the world has given no reason for optimism whatever. Nothing is in sight except a welter of lies, hatred, cruelty, and ignorance, and beyond our present troubles loom vaster ones which are only now entering into the European consciousness. It is quite possible that man's major problems will 'never' be solved.... The real problem is how to restore the religious attitude while accepting death as final. Men can be happy only when they do not assume that the object of life is happiness." Before then, in 1940, he had written of Europe's rejection of God which he approved—this way: "For two hundred years we had sawed and sawed and sawed at the branch we were sitting on. And in the end, much more suddenly than anyone had foreseen, our efforts were rewarded, and down we came. But unfortunately there had been a little mistake: The thing at the bottom was not a bed of roses after all, it was a cesspool full of barbed wire ... It appears that amputation of the soul isn't just a simple surgical job, like having your appendix out. The wound has a tendency to go septic."⁴

Believe in God, not materialism. Believe in creation, not evolution.

The Psalmist said,

Psalm 25:12 Who is the man who fears the Lord? He will instruct him in the way he should choose. 13 His soul will abide in prosperity, and his descendants will inherit the land. 14 The secret of the Lord is for those who fear him, and he will make them know his covenant.

⁴ Illustrations for Biblical Preaching. (Cited in Christianity Today, January 13, 1984, pp. 25-26.

The Lord helps a man to choose the right way—if he fears the Lord.

There is a story from World War II about an American bomber, a B-29, that took off from the island of Guam to bomb the Japanese city of Kokura. The B-29 reached the target but found that the city was covered by clouds, so they lingered over the target as long as their fuel would allow them. When the fuel supply reached the critical point they were forced to make a choice. They would have to abandon their primary target and proceed to the secondary. There was no other choice. So, the crew headed for the secondary target. When they arrived they found the sky clear. So they dropped their deadly cargo and then headed for home.

Weeks later, an officer received information from military intelligence that chilled his heart. Thousands of allied prisoners of war, the biggest concentration of Americans that were held by the Japanese, had been moved to Kokura a week before their bombing mission!

“Thank God,” breathed the officer, “Thank God for that cloud.”

It turned out that the city that had been hidden from the bomber was a prison camp and thousands of Americans are now alive who would have died but for that cloud.

But that is not the end of the story.

The secondary target that day was Nagasaki, and the bomb intended for Kokura was the world’s second atomic bomb!

Sometimes God prevents us from making a choice. In this case good for Kokura, but bad for Nagasaki. Who knows why God chose Nagasaki over Kokura? We don’t know why, but He did.

We must wonder how many times we have complained about being forced into a choice we would not have made. Was it God’s Providence that forced us? Maybe. Then again, perhaps God prevented a worse choice.

What was it that the Psalmist said?

“Who is the man who fears the Lord? He will instruct him in the way he should choose.”

Jesus told his disciples of another choice they faced. This was the choice of foundations.

Matthew 7:24 “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 “And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock.

Jesus said we must trust in what he said. That means “acting” on what he says.

Matthew 7:26 “Everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand.

Jesus said we must trust in what he said—not in what we think. That is the choice we must make. But the wisdom of the world and the circumstances of life can stand between us and trust in God. Nevertheless, choosing not to act on what Jesus said is foolish.

We must trust God, and we must trust in God’s Providence.

In Acts the 27th Chapter Luke tells how Paul and his companions embarked on an Alexandrian ship bound for Italy. Paul was under arrest and a Roman guard accompanied him to Rome so that he could stand before Caesar to appeal his imprisonment.

Luke wrote in the ninth verse,

Acts 27:9 when considerable time had passed and the voyage was now dangerous, since even the fast was already over, Paul began to admonish them, 10 and said to them, “Men, I perceive that the voyage will certainly be

with damage and great loss, not only of the cargo and the ship, but also of our lives.”

In the 11th verse we read,

Acts 11 But the centurion was more persuaded by the pilot and the captain of the ship than by what was being said by Paul.

The centurion placed his trust in the ship’s pilot and not in Paul. The centurion trusted human knowledge more than divine knowledge.

It was a bad choice. Luke wrote,

Acts 27:14 but before very long there rushed down from the land a violent wind, called Euraquilo; 15 and when the ship was caught in it and could not face the wind, we gave way to it and let ourselves be driven along. 16 running under the shelter of a small island called Clauda, we were scarcely able to get the ship’s boat under control. 17 after they had hoisted it up, they used supporting cables in undergirding the ship; and fearing that they might run aground on the shallows of Syrtis, they let down the sea anchor and in this way let themselves be driven along. 18 the next day as we were being violently storm-tossed, they began to jettison the cargo; 19 and on the third day they threw the ship’s tackle overboard with their own hands. 20 since neither sun nor stars appeared for many days, and no small storm was assailing us, from then on all hope of our being saved was gradually abandoned.

The centurion had chosen to trust the pilot of the ship and now they were lost in a storm and had no hope of being saved.

This reminds us of the saying of Jeremiah,

Jeremiah 17 Cursed is the man who trusts in
mankind and makes flesh his strength,
And whose heart turns away from the Lord.

But Paul received assurance from the Lord. And he
told them,

Acts 27:23 “For this very night an angel of the
God to whom I belong and whom I serve
stood before me, 24 saying, ‘Do not be
afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar;
and behold, God has granted you all those
who are sailing with you.’ 25 “Therefore,
keep up your courage, men, for I believe God
that it will turn out exactly as I have been
told. 26 “But we must run aground on a
certain island.” 27 but when the fourteenth
night came, as we were being driven about in
the Adriatic Sea, about midnight the sailors
began to surmise that they were approaching
some land. 28 they took soundings and
found it to be twenty fathoms; and a little
farther on they took another sounding and
found it to be fifteen fathoms. 29 fearing that
we might run aground somewhere on the
rocks, they cast four anchors from the stern
and wished for daybreak.

But there were some of them who still doubted.
They made another choice,

Acts 27:30 but as the sailors were trying to
escape from the ship and had let down the
ship’s boat into the sea, on the pretense of
intending to lay out anchors from the bow...

Even as they began to approach land the sailors had
decided not to trust Paul.

They chose to abandon ship.

The sailors on the doomed ship had chosen the
lifeboat provided with the ship and they were using
deception to get into it.

Here is a lesson for us and for all of mankind. The sailors thought there was safety in the manmade lifeboat. There wasn't.

In the same way there are people who have made lifeboats for themselves and they trust in them rather than in the Lord.

But safety is in the Lord and in his promises. God's advice that he spoke through Moses is just as valid today as it was when Israel wandered in the wilderness, and when Paul and his companions floundered upon the Mediterranean sea.

Choose life.

Deuteronomy 30:15 "See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, and death and adversity; 16 in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, that you may live and multiply, and that the LORD your God may bless you in the land where you are entering to possess it. 17 But if your heart turns away and you will not obey, but are drawn away and worship other gods and serve them, 18 I declare to you today that you shall surely perish. You will not prolong your days in the land where you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess it. 19 I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, 20 by loving the LORD your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days, that you may live in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them."

Jesus has done the same thing for our generation.

Choose the Lord because in Him there is safety.

Acts 27:31 Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, “Unless these men remain in the ship, you yourselves cannot be saved.” 32 Then the soldiers cut away the ropes of the ship’s boat and let it fall away.

Finally, they acted in faith, although under the threat of death from another quarter. Finally, they believed Paul and they chose the better way—the safer way.

Acts 27:39 When day came, they could not recognize the land; but they did observe a bay with a beach, and they resolved to drive the ship onto it if they could. 40 And casting off the anchors, they left them in the sea while at the same time they were loosening the ropes of the rudders; and hoisting the foresail to the wind, they were heading for the beach. 41 But striking a reef where two seas met, they ran the vessel aground; and the prow stuck fast and remained immovable, but the stern began to be broken up by the force of the waves. 42 The soldiers’ plan was to kill the prisoners, so that none of them would swim away and escape; 43 but the centurion, wanting to bring Paul safely through, kept them from their intention, and commanded that those who could swim should jump overboard first and get to land, 44 and the rest should follow, some on planks, and others on various things from the ship. And so it happened that they all were brought safely to land.

They obeyed the word of the Lord and they were saved. The principle that acted in their favor is the same that acts in our favor.

Believe the word of the Lord, and obey it.

Choose the way of the Lord and be saved.

Joab and Abner

There is the story of the Greek athlete who wanted to excel in the public games, but there was another athlete whose performance was much better than his. This aroused within the first athlete that pain and resentment that a man might feel when the advantage falls to another. Further, it mortified him when his fellow citizens raised a statue to celebrate the victory of his rival. This recognition caused such envy that he went out every night looking for an opportunity to destroy that monument. After he had tried several times, and was unsuccessful, he finally attempted to move the statue from its pedestal. It fell. On him. And in its fall it crushed him to death.

So it is with envy.

This athlete made a bad choice.

James wrote,

James 1:13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. 14 But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. 15 Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.

The athlete allowed envy to become malice and then he permitted malice to lead to sin. That led in turn to his own death. It was a chain of choices.

Envy destroys the one who harbors it. As the wise man wrote in Proverbs,

Proverbs 14:30 A sound heart is the life of the flesh: but envy the rottenness of the bones." KJV.

Jealousy accomplishes the same thing. Experience shows that envy and jealousy are like brother and sister. And envy and coveting are much alike.

The Bible, in the book of 2 Samuel, tells us about Joab and Abner and how envy and jealousy destroyed them. These men made bad choices.

Joab.

Joab was the son of Zeruiah. He had two brothers: Asahel and Abishai. David was his uncle. (2 Sam. 2:18). How Joab had managed to bind himself to David—the future king of Israel—the Scriptures do not say, but we do know that Joab gave David his unquestioning loyalty.

No task was too burdensome. He would undertake anything for David. No shame was so base that he would not stoop to it, if he thought David's interests might be advanced by it. Joab had the kind of courage that comes from a complete disregard of consequences, and with his courage he had a fiery temper.

Joab aspired only to 2nd place in David's kingdom. He did not want supplant David. But 2nd place he guarded with grim jealousy. Joab was David's loyal lieutenant, capable of mighty love, but at the same time capable of an abiding hatred.

Abner.

Abner was the son of Ner. Saul was his uncle. While Saul was king of Israel, Abner was the captain of Saul's army. He was the warrior who occupied the 2nd place in the kingdom of Saul. Abner held the same rank as Joab—in opposite armies. But Abner had much greater ambition than Joab. Abner was an opportunist whose only principle was expediency.⁵

The death of Saul and Jonathan.

The Bible in 1 Samuel 1:19 tells of the deaths of King Saul and Jonathan, his son. This was a turning

⁵ Interpreter's Bible p. 1056.

point in the history of Israel. Their deaths removed David's rivals for the throne of Israel. King Saul was dead. Jonathan, his son and heir, was also dead. Moreover, Saul's death also greatly reduced Abner's opportunity to greatness.

David goes to Hebron.

The Bible story continues by saying,

2 Samuel 2:1 It happened after this that David inquired of the LORD, saying, "Shall I go up to any of the cities of Judah?" And the LORD said to him, "Go up." David said, "Where shall I go up?" And He said, "To Hebron." 2 So David went up there, and his two wives also, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail the widow of Nabal the Carmelite. 3 And David brought up the men who were with him, every man with his household. So they dwelt in the cities of Hebron. 4 Then the men of Judah came, and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah.

When David became king, his lieutenant, Joab, also rose in power and prestige.

Abner and Ishbosheth.

Abner could have accepted David as king. After all, David had been anointed by God's prophet. But Abner and the other followers of Saul were not willing to subordinate themselves to David. They did not just fade away either. This was their choice.

Abner, captain of Saul's host, took Ishbosheth, the son of Saul, and brought him to Mahanaim and made him king over Israel.

Mahanaim was the capital of Gilead. The reason for choosing Mahanaim as the capital of Ishbosheth's kingdom was that the Philistines still occupied the country to the west of the Jordan. But for the moment it

appeared the Philistines were not the principal enemies of Abner. The men of Judah were, including David.

This incident shows the power and influence that Abner had. He was able to make Ishbosheth king. Ishbosheth was now David's rival. They were rival kings for the one throne.

The Field of Sharp Swords.

After the elevation of Ishbosheth there followed the incident at the "Field of Sharp Swords."

2 Sam. 2:12 Now Abner the son of Ner, and the servants of Ishbosheth the son of Saul, went out from Mahanaim to Gibeon.¹³ And Joab the son of Zeruiah, and the servants of David, went out and met them by the pool of Gibeon. So they sat down, one on one side of the pool and the other on the other side of the pool. ¹⁴ Then Abner said to Joab, "Let the young men now arise and compete before us." And Joab said, "Let them arise."

The two men posed the question, and then made their choice. Here begin the ages-old chain of events. The rising tensions between adversaries—be they individuals or nations. It is the same.

This was the incident (the *cause célèbre*, the choice to act) that overcomes the natural reluctance of the rank and file to kill their neighbors.

The story continues,

2:15 So they arose and went over by number, twelve from Benjamin, followers of Ishbosheth the son of Saul, and twelve from the servants of David. ¹⁶ And each one grasped his opponent by the head and thrust his sword in his opponent's side; so they fell down together. Therefore that place was called the Field of Sharp Swords, which is in Gibeon.

That incident started the fight. Eventually, everyone on both sides got involved. The encounter quickly escalated.

Verse 17 says,

2:17 So there was a very fierce battle that day, and Abner and the men of Israel were beaten before the servants of David.

Joab and his forces were the apparent victors, but that was not the end of the story. Both of Joab's brothers were with him—Abishai, and Asahel.

The Scripture says,

2:18 ...And Asahel was as fleet of foot as a wild gazelle. 19 So Asahel pursued Abner, and in going he did not turn to the right hand or to the left from following Abner. 20 Then Abner looked behind him and said, "Are you Asahel?" He answered, "I am." 21 And Abner said to him, "Turn aside to your right hand or to your left, and lay hold on one of the young men and take his armor for yourself." .

So, Asahel had a choice. He could pursue a lesser warrior—so to test his mettle, or he could make an attempt at victory over the head of the army of Israel.

Asahel was no doubt a young man. He was the brother of Joab—the captain of David's army. Here was Abner, the captain of the opposing army in front of him. If Asahel could strike down Abner—and take his armor—he could make his name as a warrior. People would look up to him.

Ambition drove Asahel into a bad choice. Asahel was no match for Abner, but Abner had no desire to kill him. But Asahel would not turn aside from pursuing him.

The Bible says,

2:22 So Abner said again to Asahel, "Turn aside from following me. Why should I strike you

to the ground? How then could I face your brother Joab?" 23 However, he refused to turn aside.

As it happened to Asahel, so it happens to others in their desire for what they cannot have. Sometimes, they pursue their own death.

Now Abner was carrying a spear—a bronze or iron head riveted to a wooden shaft.

Asahel would not leave him alone no matter how much Abner said to him. It was not that Abner was afraid of Asahel. Abner did not want a blood feud with his brother, Joab. Abner knew Joab. But Asahel was too ambitious to take the warning.

2 Sam. 2:23 ... Therefore Abner struck him in the stomach with the blunt end of the spear, so that the spear came out of his back; and he fell down there and died on the spot. So it was that as many as came to the place where Asahel fell down and died, stood still.

“Stood still” – from the horror of it. From the revulsion, shock and disgust. Asahel had been no match for Abner. God surely had better things in store for him had he made a different choice. But he made a bad choice, and his death caused a blood feud between Joab and Abner. And that feud remained a plague to David, and trouble in the kingdom for a generation.

2 Samuel says that,

2 Sam. 2:24 Joab and Abishai also pursued Abner.

On a hilltop Abner and his people took a stand.

2:26 Then Abner called to Joab and said, "Shall the sword devour forever? Do you not know that it will be bitter in the latter end? How long will it be then until you tell the people to return from pursuing their brethren?" 27 And Joab said, "As God lives, unless you had

spoken, surely then by morning all the people would have given up pursuing their brethren."

We would have chased you all night! Says Joab. We would not have rested until we had you! Joab's speech reveals his character. When his blood is up he is utterly ruthless. Yet, he had enough common sense that Abner could appeal to him. Yet Joab did not abandon his blood lust.

It returns later.

2:28 So Joab blew a trumpet; and all the people stood still and did not pursue Israel anymore, nor did they fight anymore.

VII. Abner's ambition.

Abner led his men all that night through the Arabah, a deeply sunken valley that extends from the slopes of Mount Hermon to the Gulf of Akabah on the Red Sea. They crossed the Jordan, and marching the whole forenoon, came to Mahanaim.

2 Sam. 2:30 So Joab returned from pursuing Abner. And when he had gathered all the people together, there were missing of David's servants nineteen men and Asahel. 31 But the servants of David had struck down, of Benjamin and Abner's men, three hundred and sixty men who died. 32 Then they took up Asahel and buried him in his father's tomb, which was in Bethlehem. And Joab and his men went all night, and they came to Hebron at daybreak.

“There was a long war between the house of Saul, and the house of David. David grew stronger, while the house of Saul became weaker. Yet while the tribes under Ishbosheth—called the house of Saul—became weaker, Abner was strengthening himself within Israel. Or so he thought!

The Interpreter's Bible says of Abner that, "The tragedy of Abner is the tragedy of an opportunist whose only principle was that of expediency. Abner was an example of what might be called the losing quality of selfishness. One of the difficulties with selfishness is simply that it does not pay off. Selfishness is blind even to its own best interest."⁶

Then we read this of Abner in 2 Samuel 3,

3:6 Now it was so, while there was war between the house of Saul and the house of David, that Abner was strengthening his hold on the house of Saul. 7 And Saul had a concubine, whose name was Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah. So Ishbosheth said to Abner, "Why have you gone in to my father's concubine?"

Ishbosheth was legally right when he objected to Abner's taking of the concubine. It was the custom that a ruler's wives and concubines should be handed down to his successor. Ishbosheth had succeeded Saul, not Abner. Abner wanted something he could not legally have. And so he made the choice for lust and that led to his violation of the law.

2 Samuel 3:8 Then Abner became very angry at the words of Ishbosheth, and said, "Am I a dog's head that belongs to Judah? Today I show loyalty to the house of Saul your father, to his brothers, and to his friends, and have not delivered you into the hand of David; and you charge me today with a fault concerning this woman? 9 "May God do so to Abner, and more also, if I do not do for David as the LORD has sworn to him; 10 "to transfer the kingdom from the house of Saul, and set up the throne of David over Israel and over Judah, from Dan to Beersheba." 11 And he

⁶ The Interpreter's Bible, p1056.

could not answer Abner another word,
because he feared him.

The Interpreter's Bible says further,
Abner had not the slightest concern for what the
Lord had sworn; Otherwise, why did he support
Ishbosheth over David? Abner was for the house of Saul
if it gave him strength and influence. He supported
Ishbosheth for his own purpose. When that purpose led
him to overstep the Law—and Ishbosheth reminded him
of it—Abner suddenly became aware of the will of God.
His taking of Rizpah, the concubine was an arrogant
thing to do. He had assumed kingly power. Absalom did
this and committed treason against his father David;
Adonijah provoked Solomon's wrath when he asked for
his father's concubine, Abishag." Indeed, Abner coveted
something he could not lawfully have. He coveted the
concubine, Rizpah. And he coveted power in David's
kingdom.

These were bad choices for a man to make.

2 Samuel 3 says,

3:12 Then Abner sent messengers on his behalf
to David, saying, "Whose is the land?"
saying also, "Make your covenant with me,
and indeed my hand shall be with you to
bring all Israel to you." 13 And David said,
"Good, I will make a covenant with you.

David probably felt that a compact with Abner
would allow him to unite all of Israel under his
leadership. Actually he did not need Abner's help to
bring all Israel to his standard. He only needed to
remove Abner as Ishbosheth's chief support. The people
would then rally to David since there was no other king.
Abner's ambition was to rise with David as he became
king.

Israel which had been ruled by Saul was declining,
but had the Israelites under Abner's leadership rallied to
David, Abner would have proceeded to make himself
strong in the house of David. This way Abner could

have placed David under obligation to himself. But the situation between Abner and Joab would have become intolerable. David's throne might well have become the storm center of contending generals.

Rivalry and hatred bear fruit.

2 Samuel 3:20 So Abner and twenty men with him came to David at Hebron. And David made a feast for Abner and the men who were with him. 21 Then Abner said to David, "I will arise and go, and gather all Israel to my lord the king, that they may make a covenant with you, and that you may reign over all that your heart desires." So David sent Abner away, and he went in peace.

Evidently, Joab was not expected to return until David and Abner had finished their talks.

Then we read in 2 Samuel 3:22,

3:22 At that moment the servants of David and Joab came from a raid and brought much spoil with them. But Abner was not with David in Hebron, for he had sent him away, and he had gone in peace. 23 When Joab and all the troops that were with him had come, they told Joab, saying, "Abner the son of Ner came to the king, and he sent him away, and he has gone in peace."

That kindled the fire in Joab. Suddenly all the bitterness of Asahel's death came back to Joab. More than that—Joab saw a threat to his own place in David's kingdom. For here was his rival, Abner, another Number-Two-Man aspiring for the number-two place in David's kingdom. Here also we see the main difference between Abner and Joab: Joab aspired to his rightful place, while Abner aspired beyond his. Joab's emotion was jealousy. He jealously desired to keep his own

place. Abner's emotion was envy, he desired for what he did not have.

Samuel wrote,

3:24 Then Joab came to the king and said, "What have you done? Look, Abner came to you; why is it that you sent him away, and he has already gone? 25 "Surely you realize that Abner the son of Ner came to deceive you, to know your going out and your coming in, and to know all that you are doing." 26 And when Joab had gone from David's presence, he sent messengers after Abner, who brought him back from the well of Sirah. But David did not know it. 27 Now when Abner had returned to Hebron, Joab took him aside in the gate to speak with him privately, and there stabbed him in the stomach, so that he died for the blood of Asahel his brother.

The Bible says that "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." In this case, Joab harbored jealousy, revenge and murder in his heart until he committed the act. Prov. 23:7.

2 Samuel 3:28 Afterward, when David heard it, he said, "My kingdom and I are guiltless before the LORD forever of the blood of Abner the son of Ner. 29 "Let it rest on the head of Joab and on all his father's house; and let there never fail to be in the house of Joab one who has a discharge or is a leper, who leans on a staff or falls by the sword, or who lacks bread." 30 So Joab and Abishai his brother killed Abner, because he had killed their brother Asahel at Gibeon in the battle.

These are the fruits of jealousy and envy. Hatred, revenge and murder harbored and nurtured in the heart

bear bitter fruit. One cannot make the choice for either of them with impunity.

David said,

2 Samuel 3:33 ... "Should Abner die as a fool dies?

34 Your hands were not bound Nor your feet put into fetters; As a man falls before wicked men, so you fell."

Indeed, Abner died as a fool dies—because he lived as a fool lives. The fool does not believe in any other purpose larger than his own advancement in life. The fool serves no cause greater than his own prestige. The fool is an atheist because he does not really believe in God—God whose sovereign purpose demands obedience of him. The fool believes only in a purpose that serves his own interest. And so his choices are made.

The admonition of Paul is so true,

Gal. 6:7 Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.

In the days of the Lord's sojourn on earth...

The Jewish rabbis thought that they were the custodians and protectors of the Law of Moses. They thought that only they could interpret the Law—authoritatively; only they could teach its precepts. Only they could appoint others to teach the Law. It was as Edersheim says,

"... there was no principle more firmly established by universal consent than that authoritative teaching required previous authorisation."

This is why we read of Jesus in Matthew 21,

21:23 When He entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to Him while He was teaching, and said, "By what authority are You doing these things, and who gave You this authority?"

The Rabbis jealously guarded their authority. This is also why we read in John Chapter 11,

John 11:47 Therefore the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council, and were saying, “What are we doing? For this man is performing many signs. 48 “If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.”

Their attitude rested on jealousy, envy and hatred. It is like Mark wrote in Chapter 15 of his gospel,

Mark 15:6 Now at the feast he used to release for them any one prisoner whom they requested. 7 The man named Barabbas had been imprisoned with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the insurrection. 8 The crowd went up and began asking him to do as he had been accustomed to do for them. 9 Pilate answered them, saying, “Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?” 10 For he was aware that the chief priests had handed Him over because of envy. 11 But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to ask him to release Barabbas for them instead. 12 Answering again, Pilate said to them, “Then what shall I do with Him whom you call the King of the Jews?”

13 They shouted back, “Crucify Him!” 14 But Pilate said to them, “Why, what evil has He done?” But they shouted all the more, “Crucify Him!”

The chief priests had handed Jesus over because of envy. They were guilty of envy, jealousy and hatred. And they used the authority of Rome to commit their murder of the innocent.

They had two choices: Barabbas, a murderer, or Christ, the Prince of Life. They chose Barabbas. And in

the end they lost their place and their nation to the Romans, anyway.

Nevertheless, on the cross Jesus said, “Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.” Luke 23:34.

He is not jealous.

He is not envious.

He bears no malice or hatred.

His forgiveness is yours today.

If you will have it.

Keeping a Straight Course.

The Isles of Scilly are an archipelago off the south western tip of the English county of Cornwall. One of the islands of Scilly, St Agnes, is the most southerly point in both England and the United Kingdom. The Isles have the dubious distinction of being the location of frequent shipwrecks, and among these was one of the greatest disasters in British naval history.

In the year 1707 on September 29, Admiral Sir Cloudesley Shovell led his fleet of twenty-one ships out of Gibraltar to return to England. His flagship was the *HMS Association*.

Clouds and gales, rain and squalls beset the ships as they journeyed north to England. When the fleet sailed out upon the open Atlantic, passing the Bay of Biscay, the weather deteriorated even further and the storms pushed the ships off their course. Nevertheless, by November 2, 1707⁷ the ships reached the mouth of the English Channel.

Admiral Shovell's officers believed that they were on the last leg of their journey. They believed the fleet was sailing safely west of Ushant, an island that lay off the coast of Brittany. However, because of a combination of the bad weather and the mariners' inability accurately to calculate their longitude, the fleet was off course and closing in on the Isles of Scilly instead. Before they could correct their mistake, the fleet struck rocks and four ships were lost.

The exact number of officers, sailors and marines killed in the sinking of the four ships is unknown. Some say 1,400. Others say there were over 2,000. Regardless of the exact number it was one of the greatest maritime

⁷ By the modern calendar.

disasters in British history. For days afterwards, bodies continued to wash onto the shores of the isles along with the wreckage of the warships and personal effects. Among the bodies was that of Admiral Sir Cloudesley Shovell.

Sir William Jumper, captain of the *Lenox*, stated that errors in the compasses had caused the navigational errors. And so the British Navy conducted a survey of compasses from the surviving ships and of those at Chatham and Portsmouth dockyards. The investigation showed what a poor state many of the compasses were in; at Portsmouth, for example, only four of the 112 wooden cased compasses from nine of the returning vessels were found to be serviceable.⁸

Steering a straight course through the dangers of the sea is difficult enough, but to attempt a sea voyage in a gale, and that without a reliable compass, is frequently disastrous. So it was with Shovell's fleet.

Steering a straight course through the gales of life is not merely difficult, it is impossible without a serviceable compass.

Paul in his first letter to Timothy wrote,

1 Timothy 1:18 This command I entrust to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may fight the good fight, 19 keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith. 20 Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have delivered over to Satan, so that they may be taught not to blaspheme.

Keeping a straight course in one's Christian life involves "fighting the good fight." We wage this battle on different fronts, but in whatever front, or calling, the Christian might have, we fight with the strength that God

⁸ Scilly Isles, UK, Naval Disaster of 1707.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scilly_naval_disaster_of_1707.

has supplied. Paul wrote in his letter to the Ephesians, in the 6th Chapter and verse ten,

Ephesians 6:10 Finally, be strong in the Lord, and in the strength of His might. 11 Put on the full armor of God, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore, take up the full armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. 14 Stand firm therefore, **HAVING GIRDED YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH, and HAVING PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, 15 and having shod YOUR FEET WITH THE PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE; 16 in** addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming missiles of the evil one. 17 And take **THE HELMET OF SALVATION,** and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. 18 With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit...

Our warfare is spiritual. The armor that Paul describes prepares us to fight spiritual battles, and to fight those without retreat. The armor prevents contestants from suffering spiritual death, from being taken prisoner, and from desertion. It has also been argued that the armor of the Christian is not for the back. So face the enemy, and stand firm.

During the Civil War there was a cavalry officer who rode a horse that had a fear of guns. After a skirmish with the enemy one day, the officer was forced

to withdraw in haste. So he swung his horse around and rode toward his own lines.

As he rode away an opposing soldier fired a shot that struck his horse on the rump. The effect this had on the officer we can only guess, but it greatly impressed the horse. Thereafter, the horse would not turn its rear to the enemy.

Besides motivating the horse, this must have had a salutary effect on the officer's career, and greatly increased other people's estimate of his courage.

Sometimes Christians need just such an impetus to keep their spiritual life going in the proper direction.

Paul said,

“having done everything... stand firm.”

So don't turn your back, spiritually. Resist the Devil and he will flee from you.

The Apostle also told Timothy,

1 Timothy 6:7 For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. 8 And if we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. 9 But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. 10 For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many a pang.

To tempt a Christian away from Christ—and his proper course in life—the world dangles before him a lucrative income, success in one's career and homes in the right neighborhood. It's a choice the servant of Christ must overcome. And it is infinitely better to take the Apostle's advice,

1 Timothy 6:11 But flee from these things, you man of God; and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness. 12 Fight the good fight of faith;

take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. 13 I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate, 14 that you keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, 15 which He will bring about at the proper time—He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords; 16 who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light; whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen.

- To “fight the good fight” leads naturally to keeping the confession.
- The Good Confession is similar to the Pledge of Allegiance.
- The Good Confession is a pledge of allegiance to Christ as Lord.

Stephen is the example of a Christian who kept his confession even unto death. He steered a true course through the storm of persecution, and the Lord allowed him at the last to gaze intently into Heaven and see the glory of God and the Lord Himself standing at the right hand of God.

In Second Chronicles the 14th, 15th, and 16th chapter the Bible tells us about Asa, king of Judah. Asa called upon the name of Jehovah, and the Lord routed the Ethiopians before the armies of Judah and Benjamin. The Ethiopians had attacked with an army of a million men, outnumbering Asa's army by nearly two to one. They also had chariots.

After the victory the prophet Azariah said to Asa,

2 Chronicles 15:2 "Listen to me Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin: the Lord is with you when you are with Him. And if you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you."

In other words, Asa, you have a choice: Seek the Lord and His favor and He will be with you; but if you disown Him, He will also disown you.

Think about it.

In the 36th year of his reign Asa had war with the king of Israel, Baasha. Instead of calling on the Lord to deliver him, Asa took gold and silver from the treasuries of the Temple and sent it to Ben-hadad, king of Syria. Instead of asking for the help of Jehovah, Asa asked the king of Syria to deliver him.

Ben-hadad delivered him.

But Hanani the seer came to see Asa. He said,

2 Chronicles 16:7 ... "Because you have relied on the king of Syria and have not relied on the Lord your God, therefore the army of the king of Syria has escaped out of your hand. 8 Were not the Ethiopians and the Lubim an immense army with very many chariots and horsemen? Yet, because you relied on the Lord, he delivered them into your hand. 9 For the eyes of the Lord move to and fro throughout the earth that he may strongly support those whose heart is completely His. You have acted foolishly in this. Indeed, from now on you will surely have wars."

Asa made a bad choice when he enlisted Ben-hadad to help him. He abandoned God.

Asa's reaction to the rebuke from Hanani the seer—he didn't like it. Asa became angry with the seer and put him in prison. Asa also oppressed some of the people at the same time.

Then there was the matter of Asa's feet.

In verse 12 of chapter 16 it says,

16:12 And in the thirty-ninth year of his reign Asa became diseased in his feet. His disease was severe, yet even in his disease he did not seek the Lord but the physicians.

What is the lesson in the choices that Asa made? Asa's example is that of a backslider. He began well, but ended trusting in outsiders rather than the Lord.

He did not keep faith in the Lord.

Steering a straight course through the temptations and trials of life involves keeping a good conscience because a defiled and wounded conscience is both a burden and an obstacle to fellowship with Christ.

The Bible tells about the shame of Adam and Eve after they had made the choice to eat of the forbidden fruit,

Genesis 3:8 And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. 9 Then the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?" 10 And he said, "I heard the sound of Thee in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid myself."

Adam and Eve had by their sinful behavior corrupted their consciences. As it happens many times with sinners, their defiled consciences motivate them to hide from the Lord. In the presence of the Lord the sinner feels naked; i.e., ashamed, embarrassed or guilty. The shame of nakedness arises from conscience, where the person knows the will of God, and understands that their behavior has been contrary to God's will.

Joseph tested his brothers when they were sent to Egypt to buy grain because of the famine in Palestine. In Genesis the scriptures say,

Genesis 42:18 Now Joseph said to them on the third day, “Do this and live, for I fear God: 19 if you are honest men, let one of your brothers be confined in your prison; but as for the rest of you, go, carry grain for the famine of your households, 20 and bring your youngest brother to me, so your words may be verified, and you will not die.” And they did so. 21 Then they said to one another, “Truly we are guilty concerning our brother, because we saw the distress of his soul when he pleaded with us, yet we would not listen; therefore this distress has come upon us.” 22 And Reuben answered them, saying, “Did I not tell you, ‘Do not sin against the boy’; and you would not listen? Now comes the reckoning for his blood.”

The conscience of the sinner accuses and convicts him much like Reuben accused his brothers. The brothers had threatened to murder Joseph, but later relented and sold him into slavery. The brothers knew what they did was wrong. They did not keep a good conscience.⁹

Their choices in life had been sinful and so they suffered for it later.

David made a grievously bad choice when he sinned with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite.¹⁰ Then a day came when Nathan the prophet pointed out his sin to him. Conscience stricken, David wrote in the 51st Psalm,

Psalm 51:10 Create in me a clean heart, O God,
And renew a steadfast spirit within me.
11 Do not cast me away from Thy presence,
And do not take Thy Holy Spirit from me.
12 Restore to me the joy of Thy salvation,

⁹ Genesis 37:20.

¹⁰ 2 Samuel Chapter 11.

And sustain me with a willing spirit.
13 Then I will teach transgressors Thy ways,
And sinners will be converted to Thee.

David saw his behavior in relation to God's law and was ashamed. He appealed to God to cleanse his heart and that is the proper move for the penitent. Nevertheless, David's choice to violate the commands of God brought calamity upon his house and upon his posterity. God told him that because of his sin that the sword would never depart from his house, and that his wives would openly commit adultery against him.¹¹

A properly trained conscience can be of great help to the Christian who wishes to steer a straight course through temptations. So, let us not be like the Hebrews who languished in their studies of the scriptures and became vulnerable to false and harmful teaching by those who would take advantage of their ignorance. It is as the writer of Hebrews said about the weightier teaching about the Christ,

Hebrews 5:11 Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. 12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. 13 For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. 14 But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

Therefore, read the scriptures regularly and diligently and become wise in the proper behavior. The

¹¹ 2 Samuel 12:10-12.

word translated “senses” refers to the “capacity to perceive clearly and hence to understand the real nature of something.”¹² With this faculty the Christian is able to chart his course more accurately. Make a better decision.

The remedy for a defiled conscience is the blood of Christ.

Hebrews 9:8 The Holy Spirit is signifying this, that the way into the holy place has not yet been disclosed, while the outer tabernacle is still standing, 9 which is a symbol for the present time. Accordingly both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make the worshiper perfect in conscience, 10 since they relate only to food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until a time of reformation.

11 But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; 12 and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. 13 For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled, sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, 14 how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

¹² Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). Vol. 1: Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: Based on semantic domains (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition.) (383). New York: United Bible Societies: **αἰσθητήριον**.

- The remedy for the defiled conscience is the blood of Christ.
- The goal of Paul’s preaching included the good conscience.

1 Timothy 1:5 But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

In December 1944 the U. S. Naval Task Force 38 under the command of Admiral William “Bull” Halsey was conducting air raids against Japanese airfields in the Philippines. Halsey brought his ships to within 300 miles of the targets and was sailing off the east coast of Luzon in the Philippine Sea. As it happens to most warships that sail the sea Halsey’s ships ran short of fuel and had to be refueled. So they began to refuel the ships—at sea. Now, refueling at sea is difficult enough, but Halsey faced another problem. A typhoon was bearing down on his fleet.

Admirals are in comand to make decisions, and that is why they are admirals. Halsey decided to continue the refueling while thinking that Typhoon Cobra would allow him enough time to complete the operation. He was wrong. The information given to Halsey about the location and direction of the typhoon was inaccurate. On December 17, Halsey unwittingly sailed the Third Fleet into the heart of the typhoon.

Weather conditions worsened considerably. Refueling had to be abandoned. Smaller ships, like destroyers and destroyer escorts, had smaller fuel tanks, and so their need for fuel occurred more frequently. Lack of fuel also meant lack of ballast to keep the ship steady in the larger waves. The wind from the typhoon rose to 100 mph; seas became mountanous, and the rain fell in torrents. Three destroyers capsized and sank, and 790 lives were lost. Nine other warships were damaged, and over 100 aircraft were wrecked or washed overboard; the aircraft carrier Monterey was forced to

battle a serious fire that was caused by a plane hitting a bulkhead.

Like Admiral Shovell, Halsey made a bad choice based on bad advice. The quality of the advice was no excuse either to the shoals of the Isles of Scilly, or to Typhoon Cobra. Ships still sank, and sailors still died. As it was for the Third Fleet, so it is with our personal lives. Sometimes we sail into the storms of life unwittingly or under bad advice, but we still suffer the consequences. The storms of life don't care if you know about them or not. They just are. The truth is there is only one compass for sailing through the storms and hazards of this life, and that compass is the Bible. Like the compass that points to the North, the Bible always points to One Person, and that is Christ.

As we read in Hebrews,

Hebrews 12:1 Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Paul's apostolic course led him through many perils, imprisonments and pains. Nevertheless, Paul kept the faith as an apostle of Christ. He weathered the hurricanes of life. He was therefore qualified to give this advice:

2 Timothy 4:7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; 8 in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.

Paul was as a ship's master, charting a course through a tumultuous sea of unbelief and persecution. Yet, he wavered not in the direction he took. He never looked back. He finished his course. And he kept the faith.

Many believe that Paul wrote the book of Hebrews, and well he could have. For we read in the Tenth Chapter of that book,

Hebrews 10:19 Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; 24 and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, 25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.

That is a course worthy of charting—and following.

The Importance of Learning the Truth

Ignorance is of different types.

I remember a boy (whose name shall remain unpublished) who lived in the same town where I grew up. I was about 12 years old when I saw him do something I have never forgotten. I saw him climb out on the limb of a tree about fifteen or twenty feet off the ground. He then placed a saw on the limb between himself and the trunk of the tree. Then he began to saw. I could not believe he would continue, so I was speechless. But I watched him finish cutting the limb off. Then as if in slow motion the freshly cut limb—with him aboard—fell, turning as it plummeted to the ground. I remember that as he fell he turned completely over in the air, and then he landed on his head. (That’s probably what saved him.)

He was unhurt.

From this I learned that some people will endanger themselves, possibly not even knowing the risk they are taking. Also I learned that some people are naturally dense. Others are merely foolhardy, reckless, or imprudent.

The truth is: as human beings we know very little although we like to think that we have great knowledge and broad understanding. Even as little as I knew then I’m sure I could have guessed what would happen if he sawed that limb off. I’m not sure he knew.

Bildad the Shuhite said to Job,

Job 8:8 “Please inquire of past generations, And consider the things searched out by their fathers. 9 “For we are only of yesterday and know nothing, Because our days on earth are as a shadow.

We have short lives, and in the greater scheme of things we have been on the earth only a short time. Even with a lot of study we remain largely ignorant of what is and what has happened in the world.

There is the story of the man who wrote a letter to Cambridge University. He had a question. We could also add that of the many questions that are asked of the faculty of Cambridge University, there are some that naively ask about scientific matters. His was one of those questions. He asked, "If the Moon takes a month to revolve around the Earth, then why is it that it is over Detroit every night?"

Was this question from a slowness of perception, or a lack of education, or was it self-imposed ignorance? Surely, this writer was ignorant of the Earth's rotation on its axis, and the revolution of the moon about the earth. Perhaps, we could say, charitably, that he was merely pulling the legs of the Cambridge professors. Whatever the cause might have been, it betrayed a kind of ignorance.

Then there are the people who are deceived, as was Abimelech,

Genesis 20:3 But God came to Abimelech in a dream of the night, and said to him, "Behold, you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken for she is married." 4 Now Abimelech had not come near her; and he said, "Lord, wilt Thou slay a nation, even though blameless? 5 Did he not himself say to me, 'She is my sister?' And she herself said, 'He is my brother.' In the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands I have done this." 6 Then God said to him in the dream, "Yes, I know that in the integrity of your heart you have done this, and I also kept you from sinning against Me; therefore I did not let you touch her. 7 Now therefore restore the man's wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you, and you will live. But if

you do not restore her, know that you shall surely die, you and all who are yours."

Abimelech was in deadly peril because he took a woman to be his wife who was already married to another man. He was deceived to be sure. But ignorance was no excuse.

If you sin you die. And death it will be even though you might think it is not sin. It is imperative to know the truth concerning matters of the type that Abimelech entered. Paul warned the Thessalonians about the coming of the Lawless one in,

2 Thessalonians 2:9 that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, 10 and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. 11 For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, 12 in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness.

So, love the truth—and be saved.

There is a seduction in wrong doing that becomes more attractive as the person engages in the behavior. It is like a narcotic that attracts with the promise of pleasure, and afterward supplies the justification to continue through acceptance of the lie. In a former generation there was a popular expression that said, "Can it be wrong if it feels so right?" Yes, it can. But in this way the adulterer assuages his own conscience and embraces the momentary pleasure of his sin.

For this and other deceptions there is only one antidote. One must believe the truth and take no pleasure in wickedness. And how can one know the truth? Thankfully, for the benefit of ignorant humanity Jesus left His home in glory and brought the light of truth

down to Earth. One must accept the truth to avoid calamity.

Moreover, it is important to realize that what we believe to be true in a fundamental sense can lead to great deception. I am speaking here of worldview. This is a sort of lens through which we view and interpret the world.

Peter wrote in his second letter,

2 Peter 3:3 Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, 4 and saying, “Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation.” 5 For when they maintain this, it escapes their notice that by the word of God the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and by water, 6 through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water.

Peter points out that the beliefs of the mockers will cause the truth to escape their notice. The belief is characteristic of people who have received public education; i.e., materialist philosophy. Today, many maintain a belief in Uniformitarian philosophy which is the basis of modern geology. This leads to a denial of the Flood of Genesis which destroyed the world. In this case they think they know the truth, but they are in fact deceived, and are ignorant.

The Bible presents a worldview that explains creation, the moral condition of mankind, and the way to salvation. Secular education presents another, often contradictory explanation of origins and the moral condition of mankind. Because these worldviews are so different they come into conflict in almost every phase of life. There is conflict in science, in politics, economics and in the structure of society. Only one of these worldviews can reveal the truth, the other leads to

false conclusions. Jesus endorsed the biblical worldview, and He embodies the truth.

In the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus Jesus told about a man who live in luxury and a beggar at his gate lived in poverty. They both died and the beggar went to a place of comfort, but the rich man went to a place of torment. The rich man entreated Abraham to send some one to warn his brothers about the place of torment after death,

Luke 16:29 “But Abraham *said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’
30 “But he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!’ 31 “But he said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.’ ”

So it is with people today. If they will not listen to Moses and the Prophets, or Jesus and the Apostles, they will not be persuaded even though someone rises from the dead. And there are numerous reasons for this unbelief, but among them must be the notion that resurrection is not an experience their worldview permits.

Jewish traditional law with its beliefs and practices led to ignorance.

Paul said concerning the Jews,

Romans 10:1 Brethren, my heart's desire and my prayer to God for them is for their salvation,
2 For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge.

A person can be zealous for God, but ignorant. And not just ignorant, but possess an ignorance that motivates them to crucify the Lord, the very One who represents the truth.

Paul described another type of ignorance in his Ephesians letter,

Ephesians 4:17 So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, 18 being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; 19 and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.

These are people who refuse instruction (they are willfully ignorant). These are justly ignorant because of the hardness of their hearts. A calloused heart is one that the truth just bounces off. It can't penetrate.

There is the story of the bishop in the 1870's who had charge of a denominational college. It was his practice to make an annual visit to the college, so he made his visit and stayed with the president of the college. The bishop boasted his confidence that everything that could be invented had been invented. The college president thought otherwise. "In 50 years," he said, "men will learn to fly like the birds."

The bishop, shocked, replied, "Flight is reserved for angels, and you have been guilty of blasphemy."

The name of the bishop was Milton Wright, and back home he had two small sons Orville and Wilbur.

Prejudice is a difficult thing to overcome.

Still, merely because something comes to us from a recognized authority does not mean that it should be accepted without question.

There is the story of a doctor who had ten patients in the hospital. A day came when he prescribed medicine for all ten and left. The next day he returned and asked the orderly, "How did the patients do last night?"

"Nine died," said the orderly.

"Nine died? But didn't I prescribe for ten?"

"Yes. But one refused the medicine."

Sometimes a person has to refuse the prescription the authorities offer. Even the authorities can be wrong; human authorities, that is.

God isn't. Paul wrote,

2 Timothy 3:16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 17 so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

Overcome your ignorance. Hold your own faith before God.

We must humbly receive instruction from God, allow the truth to penetrate our hearts and enter into our innermost being so that it can have its good and beneficial effect.

We must not allow someone else to hold our faith for us.

Don't let a preacher, a priest, a writer or any other public figure decide what you are to believe. Insist on Scriptural proof. Jesus Himself provided the example in his contest with the Devil. Jesus answered three times, "It is written..."¹³

Paul said, (concerning matters of faith),

Romans 14:22 The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves.

If you approve something based on what the minister says—and he is wrong—you will be condemned with him.¹⁴

There is the story of a clergyman who was called by a church to become its minister. He was one of those

¹³ Luke 4:4, 8, 9.

¹⁴ Matthew 15:14.

who had been strongly influenced by critical scholars who downgrade portions of the Scripture as myths. He doubted the authenticity of the whole Bible.

About two years after his coming, the minister visited one of his members who was sick to the point of death. When he learned that the man had a terminal illness, he suggested, "Perhaps you would like me to read the Bible and pray for you?"

"Yes," replied the man as he took his Bible and handed it to the minister. When the minister opened it, he was shocked at what he saw. Many of the pages were torn away, some of the chapters were missing, and a number of verses were actually cut out! It was a badly mangled volume.

So the minister asked, "Haven't you got a better Bible than this?" The dying man replied, "When you came to our church, I believed the entire Bible. But as soon as you told us that certain sections were not true, I removed them. When you said that some stories were probably fiction and referred to them as fables, I tore them out. I think if I had another year under your teaching, I would have nothing but the two covers left."

Such can be the influence of a preacher.

Read the Bible for yourself and become convinced of its truth. Don't depend on the preacher or the teacher for your faith. Have your own conviction before God. Trust God because you know what the Scripture says. God stands behind what He has inspired.

Paul said,

Ephesians 3:3 "that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. And by referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit;"

You can understand it. Put the Bible to the proper use. That means: read it.

Paul also said,

Ephesians 5:15 "Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise, making the most of your time, because the days are evil. So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is."

Don't rest on somebody else's understanding. Beware of people who say, "I just felt like God spoke to me..." If what follows is in any way a departure from the orthodox Biblical doctrine—don't believe it.

To Timothy Paul said,

1 Timothy 3:14 I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long; but in case I am delayed, I write so that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.

Paul wrote so people would know. And acquisition of that knowledge affects one's personal conduct. We should both understand what the will of the Lord is and we ought to know how to conduct ourselves in the household of God.

God does not want a single one of us to be ignorant.

In the Palestinian village of Jish, located in the Galilean hills where Jesus lived and preached, elementary school children are now being instructed in Aramaic. [Aramaic is the language that Jesus spoke.] The children belong mostly to the Maronite Christian community. Maronites still chant their liturgy [their public worship] in Aramaic but only a few understand the prayers they are offering.

So before the instruction in Aramaic the Maronites were conducting a worship service they didn't understand. This should not happen. People ought to

understand what they say. Some people worship in Latin. I wonder if they understand what they are saying. If someone tells you a dark and mysterious religious doctrine ask them to explain it and to offer references as to the source of their insight.

Paul wrote to Timothy,

2 Timothy 3:14 You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them; and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

The Scriptures are adequate. With them we are equipped for every good work. We have the instructions written down for us in the Bible. There is no need to be ignorant.

Ignore what the crowd says.

Today the majority of people are mistaken in their understanding of spiritual matters. They are ignorant of God's word.

Many years ago the publishers of Redbook magazine hired one of the top pollsters in the nation to survey a full representation of our seminaries which are supposedly preparing men for Christian service in the Protestant churches. Here are some of the results:

Of the ministers in training, 56 percent rejected the Virgin Birth of Jesus Christ. 71 percent rejected that there was life after death. 54 percent rejected the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. And 98 percent rejected that

there would be a personal return of Jesus Christ to this earth.¹⁵

In all these cases there was a majority that rejected the biblical doctrine. This survey was conducted many years ago, and I dare say that the conditions have not improved since then. Ask yourself, How many people today believe that same sex “marriage” is OK? And believe it in clear contradiction of what the Scriptures say.

Don’t think that merely because a majority of people hold a certain opinion that the opinion is correct. Large numbers of people are ignorant of God’s will. Remember, morality is not determined by referendum or by a poll taken among a society existing at one time. Neither are the fundamental doctrines of the faith subject to revision by humanistic seminaries.

Roy Riegels was the Center who played for California in the Rose Bowl of 1929. It happened for him as it may only happen once in the career of a football player—in this case a lineman. The opposing team fumbled the football at his feet. As the crowd roared he picked up the ball and started to lumber toward the goal line. The more he ran, the louder the crowd roared. The louder they cheered the harder he ran. So loud was the noise that he could not hear the anguished cries of his team mates. Why? Because Riegels ran the wrong way.

His own teammate, a California half-back, whose name was Bennie Lom, caught him and tackled him on about the one yard line, thus preventing a safety against his own team. The California team tried to punt from their one-yard line. But Tech blocked the kick and recovered the ball behind the goal. That recovery scored a two-point safety for Georgia. This proved to be Georgia Tech’s margin of victory.

California lost to Georgia Tech by a score of 8 to 7.

¹⁵ Survey conducted in 1961.

The moral of the story is: don't be confused by the noise of the crowd. In matters of religion there is a lot of "crowd noise." Ignore it. Read the Scriptures.

After Jesus had risen from the dead, and the good news of the resurrection began to spread, the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem sent delegations to many lands to preach that the disciples had stolen the body while the guards were asleep.

It was total falsehood.

But many people believed it then, and people still believe it today.

Think. Could the guards have seen anything while they were asleep?

In Luke we read that Jesus said,

Luke 11:52 "Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge; you did not enter in yourselves, and those who were entering in you hindered."

The lawyers were the scribes, the ones who copied the manuscripts. They were supposed know what the Scriptures taught. But they had taken away the key of knowledge. They were preventing people from learning the truth.

Weigh carefully what the "authorities" shout at you. Be like the Bereans,

Acts 17:11 Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.

The Bereans were hearing the preaching of Paul and Silas—and still they verified the message by consulting the Scriptures.

Be wary. Learn for yourself.

There is the story of the man who took a room at a boarding house. He was happy with the room. And he

took his meals there. But he still had a problem. The owner of the boarding house was a woman who was a really good cook and she could make excellent pies. The problem was that she cut the pie into eight pieces and the boarder wanted more. He tried several subtle maneuvers to get more pie, but none of them worked—the cost of the meals was of course figured into the board money he paid.

He knew that she was a religious woman, and that she was devoted to the Bible. The trouble was she couldn't read and so she had other people read passages from the Bible to her.

So, he devised a plan. He would read the Bible to her. One evening, during one of his Bible readings, he slipped in this verse, "Whoso cutteth the pie in more than four pieces is in danger of the hell of fire."

Now any serious reader of the Bible knows that there is no such verse. And what he did was one of the worst of deceptions. Nevertheless, at the conclusion of the following evening's supper, he enjoyed a larger piece of pie.

The morals in this story are several. What the man did was an abuse of his privileges and much worse. He corrupted the Word of God for his own advantage. In this he made himself a liar, and endangered his soul.¹⁶ The woman would have been better served if she could have read the Scriptures for herself. Regrettably, she could not read and that is a condition of risk—given the presence of religious opportunist in the world.

Do you know what is worse than being in a position where someone else has to read the scriptures to you? The answer is: knowing how to read, but refusing to do it for yourself. Or knowing how, but depending on a preacher to read and interpret for you. It is much better that one develop the skills for reading the Scriptures for himself. If that is not possible then beware of the risk.

Paul said,

¹⁶ Proverbs 30:6; Revelation 22:18, 19.

2 Timothy 2:15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth.

- Do this because some men are unscrupulous.
- Some are just plain ignorant.

The disciples once spoke to Jesus about His rebuke of the Pharisees teaching on hand washing,

Matthew 15:12 Then the disciples *came and said to Him, “Do You know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this statement?” 13 But He answered and said, “Every plant which My heavenly Father did not plant shall be uprooted. 14 “Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit.”

- “Both” fall.
- It is no excuse for someone to say, “But my pastor told me...”

Paul also said,

1 Cor. 15:33 Do not be deceived: "Bad company corrupts good morals." Become sober-minded as you ought, and stop sinning; for some have no knowledge of God.

There is the story of the woman from Denver, Colorado who went into a jewelry store looking for a necklace. “I’d like to have a gold cross,” she told the man behind the counter. The man bent and looked over the stock he had in the display case and then said, “Do you want a plain one, or do you want one with the little man on it?”

Are you kidding me? “...the little man”?

A lot of times we assume people know about God and spiritual things. That is not always true. Nowadays, “...some have no knowledge of God.” We do not live in

a Christian, Bible reading society. We live in a heathen society. Act accordingly.

Proverbs tells us that we should choose carefully the ones with whom we associate. Our companions wield a tremendous influence over what we know.

Proverbs 13:20 He who walks with wise men
will be wise, But the companion of fools will
suffer harm.

Therefore, exert the effort required to overcome your ignorance. We all have to do this. It pays dividends toward your spiritual life.

Overcoming ignorance might require humility.

There is the story of the young Filipino who traveled to Chicago. Having arrived in the city he registered at the Hotel Sherman. Later he took a walk to see the city. He became lost. Unfortunately he failed to inform himself about the hotel and its location. He was ignorant of the name, location, and appearance of the hotel, and so was unable to find it again. Consequently, he selected another room in the Hotel Astor. Unwilling to acknowledge to the authorities that he was lost, he tried for five days to find the place where he had left his baggage.

Unsuccessful, he finally appealed to the authorities. The police soon found his original registration place, and informed him that for five days he had been living next door to the place where he had left his baggage. Although so near, he lost five days' peace of mind, five days' time, and five days' use of his baggage all because he would not tell an officer that he was LOST.

Sometimes the thing that the lost are looking for is right next to them.

The priests and Saducees placed Peter under arrest, and brought him to trial in Jerusalem, asking him "By what power, and in what name have you done this?" (for he had been preaching Jesus).¹⁷

¹⁷ Acts 4:7.

Jesus and the apostles had been in Jerusalem and in the Temple itself teaching, and these Sadducees did not know whom they represented.

Acts 4:13 Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John, and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were marveling and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus.

Jesus has an effect on people that is noticeable. Jesus said,

John 8:31 So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, “If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; 32 and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.”

Being a disciple of Jesus is not a one-time reading of His word. It requires continuing in His word.

Peter said that keeping the words of Jesus provides everything that pertains to life.

2 Peter 1:2 Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. For by these he has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.

In recent years the people of the western nations have abandoned Christianity, along with the wisdom and instruction that comes from diligent scriptural study. Beginning with movement toward rationalism in Germany and with Deism in England, Modernism now

permeates every major denomination of what is called Christianity. The control of many major denominations is in the hands of willfully ignorant and ungodly men and women. So-called Christian leaders boldly and blatantly deny the Virgin Birth of Christ, the Inspiration of the Scriptures, and Atoning (Work) of Christ, the Literal Resurrection of Christ, and of course they ridicule the Second Coming of Christ.

Among the modernistic preachers is an Arlington, Virginia, minister who said, "We have closed our minds to such trivial considerations as the question of the resurrection of Christ. If you fundamentalists wish to believe that nonsense, we have no objections, but we have more important things to preach than the presence or absence of an empty tomb 20 centuries old."

This minister does not know it but spiritually he is like the boy who crawled out on the limb and then sawed himself off. He has cut himself off from the tree.

The consequences of rejecting the truth

1 Timothy 1:19 keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith.

C.E. Macartney told a story about a shipwreck off the coast of England many years ago. He said, on the stormy southwest coast of England there is a church whose towers are silent. No bells ring for the living or toll for the dead. There is a legend that a ship was once beating its way along that shore, having on board bells that were designed for this church building of Bottreaux, England. A sailor lad, heard the neighboring bells of Tintagel sounding over the sea, and he thanked God for the favor that would soon bring them safe to port.

But the Skipper was a godless man, and he told the young sailor to thank the steersman, the good ship, and the ready sail. As if in answer to his blasphemy, the sea

rose and the waves dashed the ship and its godless master on the rocks. Now they say that the bells which went down with that ship may be heard above the surge of the ocean as it breaks on the iron cliffs, pealing out the invitation of the Church, the invitation of God, the coming of death, and after death the judgment.

As it happened to that captain and his ship there are many in this life who suffer shipwreck because they willfully forget that the course of their life is in the hands of God, and that only by consulting the chart that He supplies may they reach the safety of a sheltering harbor.

The Resurrection of Christ is the foundation principle on which Christianity stands. Many of the larger denominations have abandoned the foundations of Christianity for a social gospel, which they consider more important.

It is a return to ignorance.

Paul's Sermon on Mars Hill promotes the knowledge of God,

Acts 17:22 So Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects. 23 "For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you.

Many of today's ministers and preachers are doing the opposite of what Paul was doing. They are promoting ignorance.

Paul went on to say,

Acts 17:30 "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, 31 because He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in

righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.”

Salvation, forgiveness of sins, and future judgment all depend on the resurrection of Christ from the dead. In the light of what Paul preached could the resurrection be considered a “trivial consideration”? Hardly.

Willful ignorance of the work of Christ will lead to ruin.

Jesus said,

Revelation 22:12 “Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done. 13 “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.” 14 Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city. 15 Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying.

Don't join those outside.
Come to Christ and learn.

False Teachers

In the year 1794 during the war on the Rhine the French wanted to capture the village of Rhinthal. The Austrians on the other hand wanted to keep it. So, to that end the Austrians stationed 600 hussars there to secure the village. Hussars were members of any one of several types of light cavalry used during the 18th and 19th centuries.

However, the French were determined and they mounted an attack against the village using two companies of foot soldiers. The attack came at ten o'clock at night. Unfortunately for the French the Austrians had been informed about the impending attack and were ready.

When the French saw that the Austrians were waiting in readiness, Joseph Werck, who was a trumpeter, detached himself from his own group and slipped through the Austrian lines. He was able to do this because of the darkness. When he had positioned himself to the rear of the Austrian lines he raised his trumpet and using the manner of the Austrians sounded a rally. Then in the next moment he sounded retreat.

The Austrians, deceived by the signal of the trumpet, swung about and spurred away in full retreat. The French then took possession of the village without striking a blow.¹⁸

A trumpeter, sounding a false signal in the ranks, is a lot like a false teacher. Sometimes the spiritual result is the same—retreat and defeat.

Paul warned that false teachers would arise from among the church itself. In his farewell to Ephesus the Apostle said,

Acts 20:29 “I know that after my departure
savage wolves will come in among you, not

¹⁸ Elon Foster, 6000 Sermon Illustrations, p. 615.

sparing the flock; 30 and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.

These teachers trumpet false messages, some sounding retreat when the true message is one of victory. Some will bring their deceitful message from outside sources, and some will arise from within the congregations. The result will be much the same.

False prophets will oppose the truth and attempt to turn prospective believers to the lie.

Paul and Barnabas traveled the length of Cyprus from Salamis to Paphos preaching the gospel, and when they came to Paphos they encountered Elymas a false prophet whose name was also Bar-Jesus. Elymas opposed Paul. In this case Paul said Elymas was filled with deceit and fraud and that he attempted to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord. Luke wrote about the incident in Acts Chapter 13.

Acts 13:5 When they reached Salamis, they began to proclaim the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews; and they also had John as their helper. 6 When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they found a magician, a Jewish false prophet whose name was Bar-Jesus, 7 who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence. This man summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. 8 But Elymas the magician (for so his name is translated) was opposing them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. 9 But Saul, who was also known as Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, fixed his gaze on him, 10 and said, “You who are full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord? 11 “Now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon

you, and you will be blind and not see the sun for a time.” And immediately a mist and a darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking those who would lead him by the hand.

In this case, as it is frequently, the false prophet attempts to prevent a willing recipient from hearing the truth. He opposes the presentation of the message from God, and provides instead a message of deceit.

Charles T. Russell wrote a book entitled *Studies in the Scriptures*, first called *Millennial Dawn*. In the periodical Watchtower he wrote, “If anyone lays *Scriptural Studies* aside even after he has become familiar with them, even after he has read them for ten years, and goes to the Bible alone, though he has understood his Bible for ten years, our experience shows that within two years he goes into darkness.”¹⁹

By placing his book between the Bible and the willing reader of Scripture, Russell became typical of the false teachers.

On the same page of the Watchtower magazine Russell wrote, “If the six volumes of *Scripture Studies* are practically the Bible topically arranged, with Bible-proofs given, we might not improperly name the volumes—the Bible in arranged form. That is to say, they are not merely comments on the Bible, but they are practically the Bible itself.”

We might also ask that if Russell’s valuation of his book was true then what of the millions of readers of Scripture who preceded the publication of his book. Did they remain in darkness?

The seer and the prophet

The Bible, in the Old Testament, speaks of prophets and seers. A prophet was one who spoke for God, and the Greek word indicates one who proclaims (literally,

¹⁹ L. G. Tomlinson, *Churches of Today in Light of the Scriptures*, 5th. ed., Gospel Advocate Company, Nashville, 1957. P98. Ref. to Watchtower, Sept. 15, 1910, p. 298.

speaks for) and interprets divine revelation. The seer on the other hand was one who experiences and reports or interprets a dream or vision; such figures are frequently associated with ecstatic states.²⁰

Peter said in his second letter,

2 Peter 2:1 But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. 2 Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; 3 and in their greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep.

In the middle of the Second Century AD a man named Marcion, claiming a special kind of mystical insight, vehemently rejected the Old Testament, saying that as a book it had an inferior message. He claimed to be a Christian, but he was truly one of the principal spokesmen of Gnosticism. Marcion taught that the OT and NT reveal two different gods. He said that the god of the OT was the creator of matter, which, according to gnostic teaching, was evil. Thus, according to Marcion, the OT was useless.²¹

Peter's prediction accurately described what would take place over a hundred years before Marcion began to advocate his doctrine. Marcion's teaching was heresy. He was a false teacher. The word "heresy" is from a Greek word which means: choice; it carries the notion of self-will, and eventually as separation in a bad sense.

20 Myers, A. C. (1987). *The Eerdmans Bible dictionary* (851). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

21 Cabal, T. (2007). *Notable Christian Apologist: Irenaeus*. In C. O. Brand, E. R. Clendenen, P. Copan & J. P. Moreland (Eds.), *The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith* (C. O. Brand, E. R. Clendenen, P. Copan & J. P. Moreland, Ed.) (1866). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

The doctrines that these false teachers would bring in would be untrue.²²

In Isaiah's time the Israelites preferred false prophets

Isaiah 30:9 For this is a rebellious people, false sons,

Sons who refuse to listen
To the instruction of the LORD;

10 Who say to the seers, "You must not see visions";

And to the prophets, "You must not prophesy to us what is right,

Speak to us pleasant words,
Prophesy illusions.

11 "Get out of the way, turn aside from the path,
Let us hear no more about the Holy One of Israel."

False teachers say pleasant things

If a doctrine is unpleasant then people will reject it even though it may be true. In Acts the 6th Chapter the opponents of Stephen accused him of blasphemy and dragged him before the Council for trial, but they were unable to refute his words which he spoke in his own defense. But rather than admit the falsity of their own claim Luke says that,

Acts 7:54 Now when they heard this, they were cut to the quick, and they began gnashing their teeth at him.

And,

Acts 7:57 ...they cried out with a loud voice, and covered their ears and rushed at him with

²² ἀῖρεσις, εως f: the content of teaching which is not true—'false teaching, untrue doctrine, heresy.' Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). Vol. 1: Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: Based on semantic domains (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition.) (414). New York: United Bible Societies.

one impulse. 58 When they had driven him out of the city, they began stoning him...

Old Testament prophets constantly encountered kings and priests who refused to listen. "Prophecy good and not evil," they would say. Typical of these was Ahab, King of Israel, who enlisted Jehoshaphat, King of Judah, to go to war with him.

1 Kings 22:5 Moreover, Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, "Please inquire first for the word of the LORD." 6 Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, about four hundred men, and said to them, "Shall I go against Ramoth-gilead to battle or shall I refrain?" And they said, "Go up, for the Lord will give it into the hand of the king." 7 But Jehoshaphat said, "Is there not yet a prophet of the LORD here that we may inquire of him?" 8 The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "There is yet one man by whom we may inquire of the LORD, but I hate him, because he does not prophesy good concerning me, but evil. He is Micaiah son of Imlah." But Jehoshaphat said, "Let not the king say so."

Ahab did not like Micaiah's prophecies concerning him so he turned to prophets who prophesied pleasant words.

In the end Micaiah's prophecy proved to be true and Ahab died as the prophet stated.

As the false prophets of the OT spoke, false teachers of today also tend to say things people want to hear.

Sisera was the captain of the army of Jabin king of Canaan and he had nine hundred iron chariots under his command besides other troops. In the days of Sisera Jabin ruled over Israel and oppressed them for twenty years. But Deborah, a prophetess of Ephraim, incited Barak, son of Abinoam, to deliver Israel. So Barak took

ten thousand men from Naphtali and Zebulun and went up to fight against Sisera. The Bible says in the book of Judges,

Judges 4:14 Deborah said to Barak, “Arise! For this is the day in which the LORD has given Sisera into your hands; behold, the LORD has gone out before you.” So Barak went down from Mount Tabor with ten thousand men following him. 15 The LORD routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army with the edge of the sword before Barak; and Sisera alighted from his chariot and fled away on foot. 16 But Barak pursued the chariots and the army as far as Harosheth-hagoyim, and all the army of Sisera fell by the edge of the sword; not even one was left.

But the story did not end there.

Judges 4:17 Now Sisera fled away on foot to the tent of Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite, for there was peace between Jabin the king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite. 18 Jael went out to meet Sisera, and said to him, “Turn aside, my master, turn aside to me! Do not be afraid.” And he turned aside to her into the tent, and she covered him with a rug. 19 He said to her, “Please give me a little water to drink, for I am thirsty.” So she opened a bottle of milk and gave him a drink; then she covered him.

Judges Chapter 5 contains the *Song of Deborah and Barak*. In the twenty-fifth verse of the same Chapter the Bible tells how Jael brought to Sisera “in a magnificent bowl she brought him curds.” Macartney says, “This lordly dish was used only when the most honored and distinguished guests were in the home. The use of this dish by Jael made Sisera feel that Jael thought it a high

honor to entertain him, and thus any suspicions he might have had were set at rest.

“Under the spell of flattery men are often fools immeasurable, and in its intoxication are led to do things that in the clear light of reason they would never have done.”²³

The *Song of Deborah and Barak* continues,

Judges 5:26 “She reached out her hand for the tent peg,

And her right hand for the workmen’s hammer.

Then she struck Sisera, she smashed his head;

And she shattered and pierced his temple.

27 “Between her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay;

Between her feet he bowed, he fell;

Where he bowed, there he fell dead.

Flattery is a ready tool of the false teacher, and their smooth words have brought ruin to many churches.

Romans 16:17 Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who **cause dissensions and hindrances** contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. 18 For such men are **slaves**, not of our Lord Christ but **of their own appetites**; and by their **smooth and flattering speech** they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting.

1 Thessalonians 2:3 For our exhortation does not come from error or impurity or by way of deceit; 4 but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we

²³ C. E. Macartney, *Macartney’s Illustrations*. p. 381.

speak, not as **pleasing men**, but God who examines our hearts. 5 For we never came with **flattering speech**, as you know, nor with a **pretext for greed**—God is witness—6 nor did we seek **glory from men**, either from you or from others, even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority.

Paul points out three characteristics of teachers whose motives were doubtful. These were: using flattery; using a ruse that would lead to personal gain for themselves; or demonstrating that they only wanted to elevate themselves in the eyes of their hearers.

See also: 1 Timothy 4:1-4.

False teachers tend to rely on personal experiences, such as: self-denial that leads heavenly visions, or the use of personal religious experience as a basis of authority.

Colossians 2:18 Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, 19 and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God.

In the early Colossian church to whom Paul addressed his letter there were false teachers who boasted of fasting that led them to receive special religious experiences. They told of participating the worship that angels performed before God, and that through that experience they received visions of heavenly mysteries.

The Apostle criticizes the teachings of these false teachers as arising from themselves and because of that they were rejecting the Head; that is, Christ.

Or, persuasive arguments.

Colossians 2:4, 8.

False teachers of today are frequently pursuing money.

As some of the false prophets of the Old Testament spoke for money and personal gain, so do some of the so-called prophets of today. For example: the Old Testament prophet Balaam accepted money for his prophetic service.

The Daily Beast reported on a young man named Yakim Manasseh Jordan who said that he can predict the future, heal the sick, and for the low price of \$1,000, he can even raise the dead. According to Jordan's bio, he began preaching at eight years old. His followers called him "The Young Prophet." As the legend goes, his birth was foretold by Benny Hinn, one of the richest and most famous televangelists and faith healers in North America.²⁴

1 Timothy 6:3 If anyone advocates a different doctrine and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, 4 he is **conceited and understands nothing**; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, 5 and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, **who suppose that godliness is a**

²⁴ Brandy Zadrozny, "He'll Raise You From the Dead for \$1,000" - The Daily Beast.
<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2016/03/20/he-ll-raise-you-from-the-dead>.

means of gain. 6 But godliness actually is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment. 7 For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. 8 If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content.

2 Corinthians 2:17 For we are not like many, **peddling the word of God**, but as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God.

There are many false teachers who have entered the ministry not to proclaim the gospel of Christ, but to make money for themselves. These are people who live in mansions, and drive limousines while they coerce money from people who are spiritually weak.

See also: Titus 1:10-11.

False teachers mock God.

Isaiah spoke of people who tempt God, who invert morality and who they think they “know it all.” They are heroic in drunkenness and debauchery; and for money they acquit the wicked of their sin, while they deprive the righteous of their basic rights.

Isaiah 5:18 Woe to those who drag iniquity with the cords of falsehood, And sin as if with cart ropes;

19 Who say, “Let Him make speed, let Him hasten His work, that we may see it; And let the purpose of the Holy One of Israel draw near And come to pass, that we may know it!”

20 Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; Who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!

21 Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes
And clever in their own sight!

22 Woe to those who are heroes in drinking
wine

And valiant men in mixing strong drink,

23 Who justify the wicked for a bribe,
And take away the rights of the ones who are in
the right!

False teachers oppose Christ.

Among the many mistaken doctrines that Charles T. Russel advocated are these:

1. That there is only one person in the Godhead.
2. That Christ was a created angel before he came to earth.
3. That Christ did not rise bodily from the dead.
4. That Christ is forever dead.
5. That Jesus was not divine until after his death.
6. That Christ is not a Mediator.
7. That the Holy Spirit is only the influence or power exercised by the one God.
8. That the Kingdom has not yet been established.
9. That the gospel is preached in the present age only as a witness.
10. Man will have a second chance at salvation.

There are many other false teachings associated with the writings of Charles T. Russell. The above are cited to show that Russellism opposes Christ and the gospel of Christ. As the Apostle John wrote,

2 John 7 For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist.

And from Jude,

Jude 3 Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.

4 For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

As Jude wrote, the gospel was “once for all” handed down to the saints; i.e., the Christians. The gospel message did not have to wait for hundreds of years until Russell published his *Studies in the Scriptures* in order to understand what the apostolic message meant.

False teachers oppose the apostolic doctrine.

The stereotypical villain wears a drooping wide brimmed hat, has a black moustache, is dressed in a dark trench coat, has a suspicious expression on his face and slinks around on the edge of crowds. But that is not how the false teacher appears when you see one. He gives the impression that he is an angel of light.

The false teacher comes to you in the cloak of piety. They may be the most honored religious leaders and teachers, but their effect is the same.

A religious leader in a Dayton Tennessee church, when confronted with scripture showing that a practice approved by the elders of his church contradicted the teaching of the scriptures, said, “We know what it says. We’re going to do this anyway.”

There is false teaching because the teacher does not know the truth. That's bad enough. But there is false teaching where the teacher knows the truth but c

hooses to violate the scriptural injunction—anyway. The first is the sin of ignorance. The second is the high-handed sin which is frequently fatal to the soul.²⁵

It quite useful to keep in mind this admonition Paul wrote to the Galatians,

Galatians 1:8 But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! 9 As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!

He said it twice.

False teachers face perdition.

Teaching false doctrine in the place of the gospel of Christ is not a minor offense. It is an evil deed. As the Apostle John wrote,

2 John 9 Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. 10 If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; 11 for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds.

²⁵ . *Vol. 6: Theological dictionary of the New Testament.* 1964- (G. Kittel, G. W. Bromiley & G. Friedrich, Ed.) (electronic ed.) (471). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans. "...the distinction between the sin of ignorance (ποιεῖν ἀκουσίως, Nu. 15:29), which may be expiated cultically, and wilful sin (ποιεῖν ἐν χειρὶ ὑπερηφανίας, Nu. 15:30; cf. Dt. 17:12), which is punished with death." See also, Heb. 10:26.

John also left us this caution,

1 John 4:1 Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. 2 By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; 3 and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.

Apostasy

BBC News reported that a mainstream Protestant church in Gorinchem, Netherlands, called the Exodus Church, is led by an avowed atheist named Klaas Hendrikse. This is like appointing a wolf to the care of the sheep. The outcome is predictable.

The appointment of an atheist to such a high position in a church is an egregious error. This may be understood from what the writer of Hebrews said,

Hebrews 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

Judging from what the writer of Hebrews said, God is not pleased with this individual, and it is doubtful that He is pleased with the church. Evidently, Hendrikse is not the only atheist or agnostic to lead a church in the Netherlands. His views are shared by one-in-six clergy in the Protestant Church in the Netherlands (PKN) and six other smaller denominations in that country.²⁶

In Romans, Paul said that it is necessary to believe that God raised Jesus from the dead, and to be willing to confess Him as Lord in order to be saved.²⁷ Evidently, many in the PKN deny these doctrines, and have instead embraced the doubts of the false teachers.

Responsible churches would never appoint atheists either to teaching or ministerial positions; when such a thing happens it tells of a church whose leadership has abandoned the faith. Predictably, the rest of the congregation will soon follow.

²⁶ Robert Pigott, Religious affairs correspondent, Amsterdam, BBC News online, Aug. 5, 2011.
<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-14417362>.

²⁷ Romans 10:9, 10.

Abandonment

Julian, whose original name was Flavius Claudius Julianus, was proclaimed Emperor of Rome by his troops in AD 361. He served for about two years. He was also a scholar and military leader. As a young man he grew up in the counsels of Christianity; nevertheless, he publicly announced his conversion to paganism in 361, thereafter, he became an enemy of Christianity; thus he acquired the epithet “the Apostate.” Earlier in life Julian was a lector, a minor official in the Christian church, and his later writings show a detailed knowledge of the Bible, likely acquired in his early life.

Wikipedia says of Julian,

Looking back on his life in 362, Julian wrote, in his thirty-first year, that he had spent twenty years in the way of Christianity and twelve in the true way, i.e., the way of Helios.²⁸

Helios was Greek for sun.

Britannica says,

Julian’s freedom as a student had a powerful influence on him and ensured that for the first time in a century the future emperor would be a man of culture. He studied at Pergamum, at Ephesus, and later at Athens. He adopted the cult of the Unconquered Sun.²⁹

Julian was a man who studied the pagan religions, and pagan philosophy and made a choice for paganism.

In his first letter to Timothy, Paul speaks of a “falling away” from the faith by some who have been seduced by spirits who spread the lies of Satan.³⁰ Paul

²⁸ Wikipedia.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julian_\(emperor\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julian_(emperor))

²⁹ Stewart Henry Perowne, E. Christian Kopff,
<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Julian-Roman-emperor>.

³⁰ 1 Timothy 4:1.

calls the teachings doctrines of demons. In this admonition about “falling away” Paul used a Greek word that means, to abandon a former relationship or association, or to dissociate (a type of reversal of beginning to associate)—‘to fall away, to forsake, to turn away.’³¹ Clearly, any church that denies the resurrection of Christ, and teaches that He was not God’s Son who came in the flesh has fallen away. John calls such teaching the message of the antichrist. He wrote,

2 John 7 For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist.

These are foundational doctrines that members of the clergy of the PKN church are denying. Yet they still occupy positions of influence in the church. The spiritual life of the members of this church is like the story of the man who had a mule. And while he liked the idea of owning a mule, yet he disliked the idea of feeding him expensive oats. To remedy this situation he decided to substitute sawdust for a portion of the oats that he fed the mule. Gradually, he increased the proportion of sawdust in the mule’s diet. Everything went well for a while, but by the time the mule got used to the new diet, he died.

The same is true of the PKN Church, and any other church that denies the spiritual food supplied in the scriptures. They will die spiritually, if they are not already dead.

Paul wrote to the Colossians a message that could have served Julian the Apostate as well as the PKN church,

³¹ Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). Vol. 1: Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: Based on semantic domains (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition.) (448). New York: United Bible Societies. ἀφίσταμαι (and 2nd aorist active):

Colossians 2:8 See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ. 9 For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, 10 and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority; 11 and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ; 12 having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

Philosophy and empty deception are effective methods that Satan uses to induce blindness into his victims. All too frequently the result is that the victim falls away from the faith and wanders in spiritual blindness.

But there are other stresses that can lead to falling away from the faith.

Social and family pressure.

In John the 9th Chapter is the incident concerning a man who was born blind, whom Jesus healed on a Sabbath. In this case Jesus performed a remarkable miracle, yet when it came to the attention of the Pharisees they would not believe the report of the miracle. They denied it, saying that it was done on a Sabbath, and to them that was sin; further, they objected saying that he must not have been born blind; therefore, there was no miracle. But when the evidence from the parents of the blind man, and the blind man's unwavering testimony rebutted what they said, the opponents of Jesus resorted to coercion.

John wrote,

John 9:18 The Jews then did not believe it of him, that he had been blind and had received sight, until they called the parents of the very one who had received his sight, 19 and questioned them, saying, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? Then how does he now see?” 20 His parents answered them and said, “We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; 21 but how he now sees, we do not know; or who opened his eyes, we do not know. Ask him; he is of age, he will speak for himself.” 22 His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that if anyone confessed Him to be Christ, he was to be put out of the synagogue.

Edersheim wrote the following about this threat to put them out of the synagogue,

For to persons so wretchedly poor as to allow their son to live by begging, the consequences of being, ‘un-Synagogued,’ or put outside the congregation²—which was to be the punishment of any who confessed Jesus as the Messiah—would have been dreadful. Talmudic writings speak of ... three, kinds of ‘excommunication,’ of which the two first were chiefly disciplinary, while the third was the real ‘casting out,’ ‘un-Synagoguing,’ ‘cutting off from the congregation.’ The first and lightest degree was the so-called *Neziphah* or *Neziphutha*; properly, ‘a rebuke,’ an inveighing. Ordinarily, its duration extended over seven days; but, if pronounced by the Nasi, or Head of the Sanhedrin, it lasted for thirty days. In later times, however, it only rested for one day on the guilty person.

The *second degree* of Jewish excommunication was the so-called *Niddui* (from the verb to thrust, thrust out, cast out). This lasted

for thirty days at the least, although among the Babylonians only for seven days. At the end of that term there was ‘a second admonition,’ which lasted other thirty days. If still unrepentant, the third, or real excommunication, was pronounced, which was called the *Cherem*, or ban, and of which the duration was indefinite. Any three persons, or even one duly authorised, could pronounce the lowest sentence. The greater excommunication (*Niddui*)—which, happily, could only be pronounced in an assembly of ten—must have been terrible, being accompanied by curses,¹ and, at a later period, sometimes proclaimed with the blast of the horn.

Still more terrible was the final excommunication, or *Cherem*, when a ban of indefinite duration was laid on a man. Henceforth he was like one dead. He was not allowed to study with others, no intercourse was to be held with him, he was not even to be shown the road. He might, indeed, buy the necessaries of life, but it was forbidden to eat or drink with such an one.

We can understand how everyone would dread such an anathema. But when we remember what it would involve to persons in the rank of life, and so miserably poor as the parents of that blind man, we no longer wonder at their evasion of the question put by the Sanhedrin. And if we ask ourselves, on what ground so terrible a punishment could be inflicted to all time and in every place—for the ban once pronounced applied everywhere—simply for the confession of Jesus as the Christ, the answer is not difficult.³²

³² Edersheim, A. (1896). *Vol. 2: The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (183–184). New York: Longmans, Green, and Co.

When this type of pressure is applied to a person it is easy to see how they might acquiesce to the demands of their community superiors and deny an affiliation with God. Human beings tend to avoid unpleasant consequences, pursue the less uncomfortable in the short run, even though it might lead to a schism with God. But it is still a “falling away.”

The writer of Proverbs said,

Proverbs 25:26 Like a trampled spring and a polluted well

Is a righteous man who gives way before the wicked.

As Proverbs describes him, so is the man who succumbs to the pressure of community forces who would coerce him to deny Christ.

To the credit of the man who had been born blind, he did not deny Christ. To him the choice he faced was obvious.

John 9:28 They reviled him and said, “You are His disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. 29 “We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where He is from.” 30 The man answered and said to them, “Well, here is an amazing thing, that you do not know where He is from, and yet He opened my eyes. 31 “We know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is God-fearing and does His will, He hears him. 32 “Since the beginning of time it has never been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. 33 “If this man were not from God, He could do nothing.” 34 They answered him, “You were born entirely in sins, and are you teaching us?” So they put him out.

They put him out. And he endured it. But how many are they who yield to the coercion of the wicked only for the bread that perishes.

It is told that in the year 785 AD., Abdallah Ibn Malik, who was Chief of Police of Baghdad, walked 2,500 miles to Mecca to atone for an act of treason. But he made the entire journey on quilts spread on the desert sands by an army of slaves.

Shall we be borne to heaven on flowery beds of ease, or shall we choose Christ and endure afflictions with Him?

Backsliding.

Previous habits are powerful motivators. Especially tempting are the habits and practices of a previous religion. Jewish Christians during the early days of the church faced from their countrymen the pressure to go back to Judaism, and the inward desire to return to their previous customs and religious practices. It must have been easy to yield to both the inward and the outward pressure. They had been educated in the Law of Moses, and the traditional law of the Jews. They were accustomed to those institutions. The rabbis had molded their minds in the doctrine and forms of Judaism. Their habits and customs from childhood had served to instill in them the rites and ceremonies of the Law. As Milligan wrote,

And to these educational predilections in favor of Judaism, there were added also many other causes of discontent and discouragement in their Christian course. The same spirit of envy and malice which had moved the unbelieving Jews to put to death the Lord of life and glory, still prompted and excited them to harass and annoy in every conceivable way his innocent and unoffending followers. The scribes and rulers exercised all their powers of logic, rhetoric, and sophistry, against the despised Nazarene, as they were wont to call our Immanuel; and when the

force of argument was unavailing, they had recourse to persecution. Some of them they killed; some, they put into prison; and others, they despoiled of their goods—and all this they did with the view of putting a stop to the progress of Christianity, and inducing all to follow Moses as their leader.³³

Despite all these obstacles to faith and motivations to abandon Christ the writer of Hebrews points out that apostasy is a thing to be avoided because it prevents further repentance, and restoration to Christ.

Hebrews 6:4 For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, 5 and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, 6 and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame.

And,

Hebrews 12:15 See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled; 16 that there be no immoral or godless person like Esau, who sold his own birthright for a single meal. 17 For you know that even afterwards, when he desired to inherit the blessing, he was rejected, for he found no place for repentance, though he sought for it with tears.

Milligan says further,

³³ R. Milligan, *New Testament Commentary, Epistle to the Hebrews*, Gospel Advocate Company, Nashville, 1961. p. 32.

1. These texts speak of apostasy, not a sin of ignorance or weakness such as beset every Christian.

2. Such apostasy is an act of the will—a choosing to neglect, renounce or ignore Christ and His way of life.

3. There is no room for repentance (changing the mind so as to change the life), for the will is set in the opposite direction.

4. To turn from God's blessings prevents those same blessings being the cause for diligence or motives for repentance. The Christian has enjoyed in Christ all that God has to offer (though he grows in the experiencing of these blessings according to his own capacity and development). To turn from these blessings is to put an end to God's appeal which they contain.

5. The one who can be sorry for sin and turn to Christ with a pure heart is not an apostate, for his will is still set on pleasing God. The basic and primary sense of "apostasy" is a conscious choosing to reject the salvation and lordship of Jesus.

- Apostasy is a conscious choice.
- In this case it was a choice by Christians to return to Judaism, and to their former manner of life.

The allure of the world.

Paul had a companion whose name was Demas. Smith says that Demas is probably a contraction of Demetrius.³⁴ Demas remained with Paul during the apostles's first imprisonment at Rome in about the year 57 AD. Paul, in his letters to Philemon and to the

³⁴ William Smith, LLD, *A Dictionary of the Bible*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1979, p. 142.

Colossians, includes Demas in the greetings. In writing to Philemon Paul includes Demas in his “fellow workers.” But in Paul’s second letter to Timothy he wrote,

2 Timothy 4:9 Make every effort to come to me soon; 10 for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. 11 Only Luke is with me...

Demas abandoned Paul and returned to Thessalonica because he loved the world that existed at that time. Vine says the Greek word Paul used here means, an age, a period of time, marked in the New Testament usage by spiritual or moral characteristics, and is sometimes translated “world”³⁵

Demas abandoned the promise of life eternal in the world to come, and chose instead to go to Thessalonica.

Josephus wrote that in the intertestamental period the Jews of Palestine felt heavy pressure to abandon their Jewish heritage, and become Hellenized; that is, adopt the Greek way of life. During the time of Antiochus Epiphanes the High Priest, Onias, died, and the office went to Jesus his brother. But the king took the high priesthood away from him and gave it to his younger brother, whose name was also Onias. The older brother, Jesus, had changed his name to Jason—a Greek name. Onias was called Menelaus. They took these names because Antiochus was Greek and he wanted to impress the Greek culture on the Jews. Jesus who was called Jason raised opposition to his brother Onias, and the multitude of people were divided as to which one to support. Onias and his followers took the dispute to Antiochus. Onias and his followers promised the king that they desired to leave the laws of their country, and

³⁵ Vine, W., & Bruce, F. (1981). Vol. 2: Vine’s Expository dictionary of Old and New Testament words (233). Old Tappan NJ: Revell.

the Jewish way of living. It was their intention to follow the Greek way of life, and submit to the laws of King Antiochus. Accordingly, they asked his permission to build a gymnasium in Jerusalem where they could hold competitive games of sport.

Antiochus gave them permission. To further accommodate the Greek way of life they built the gymnasium. Now in this arena the men performed their competition naked. So to hide their Jewish circumcision, and to appear more Greek, they submitted to a surgical operation that reversed their circumcision. In this way they left the customs of their own country and imitated the practices of the Greeks.³⁶

This illustrates the type of pressure that falls on people to abandon their own heritage and adopt that of another, even one that causes them to deny the very thing that is the symbol of their nationality, a mark given to them on the 8th day of life.

Demas abandoned something more striking.
Paul wrote to the Romans,

Romans 12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren,
by the mercies of God, that you present your
bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to
God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And
do not be conformed to this world, but be
transformed by the renewing of your mind,
that you may prove what is that good and
acceptable and perfect will of God.

The Jews living under the reign of Antiochus succumbed to the temptation to conform to the world that was then present. They abandoned their Jewishness and adopted the Greek way of life, even to the point of disfiguring their bodies to appear Greek.

Demas abandoned his Christianity—for
Thessalonica.

³⁶ Josephus, *Antiq.*, Book XII, ch. V, 1.

Apostasy

Apostasy is a slightly different idea than mere “falling away” or “forsaking.” Paul used a word for apostasy in his second letter to the Thessalonians where he said,

2 Thessalonians 2:1 Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, 2 that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. 3 Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, 4 who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God.

The Greek word for apostasy here means, to rise up in open defiance of authority, with the presumed intention to overthrow it or to act in complete opposition to its demands—it means ‘to rebel against, to revolt, to engage in insurrection, or rebellion.’³⁷ And this rebellion accompanies the appearance of the lawless one, called by some The Antichrist.

People who abandon Christ and turn instead to the secular explanations for human existence and human experience should realize the staggering power of deception that Satan wields. He is a liar, and a deceiver and he has the power to infuse with doubt and unbelief anyone who abandons Christ.³⁸

³⁷ Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Vol. 1: Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: Based on semantic domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition.) (495). New York: United Bible Societies. ἀποστασία, ας f; ἀκαταστασία, ας f:

³⁸ John 89:42-44; 2 Thess. 2:11; 2 John 7-11.

Think of what the Lord said to Peter before the latter's temptation,

Luke 22:31 "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat;

The sense of Luke's statement is that Satan has asked and received permission to test you, "to winnow you as a farmer separates the wheat from the chaff."³⁹

Perhaps these doubting clergy of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands have underestimated the power of Satan. John didn't. He said to the church,

1 John 5:19 We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.

Satan wields power over the whole world—with the exception of those who belong to Christ. A mere human cannot match the strength of Satan.

Refusal to listen

Isaiah in the 30th Chapter of his book speaks against the apostasy of Israel. It is reminiscent of the condition of America's churches today, and elsewhere.

³⁹ Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). Vol. 1: Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: Based on semantic domains (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition.) (521). New York: United Bible Societies. σινιάζω: to sift by shaking in a sieve—'to sift.' ὁ Σατανᾶς ἐξητήσατο ὑμᾶς τοῦ σινιάσαι ὡς τὸν σῖτον 'Satan has received permission to sift you like wheat' Lk 22:31. The expression ὑμᾶς τοῦ σινιάσαι ὡς τὸν σῖτον in Lk 22:31 is clearly a type of figurative usage and in many languages must be translated as 'to test you' or 'to test you so as to separate the good from the bad.' In some languages, however, it may be more satisfactory to shift the figure from sifting to winnowing and hence translate 'to winnow you like a farmer who separates the wheat from the chaff.'

Isaiah 30:9 For this is a rebellious people, false sons, Sons who refuse to listen to the instruction of the LORD; 10 Who say to the seers, “You must not see visions”; And to the prophets, “You must not prophesy to us what is right, Speak to us pleasant words, prophesy illusions. 11 “Get out of the way, turn aside from the path, Let us hear no more about the Holy One of Israel.”

Peter Jones, writing in *Biblical Foundations for manhood and womanhood* said,

At Harvard Divinity School, studies are now dominated by the feminist perspective. In a semi-humorous but well-documented article entitled “What’s up at Harvard Divinity School?” Jewish social commentator Don Feder recounts that Buddhist chanting and meditation are now more popular than hymn singing, and the Christian calendar is passed over in favor of pagan holidays. According to Feder, feminist goddess worship is the grill through which religion, Christian theology, and the Bible are now interpreted.⁴⁰

Elsewhere, an Arlington, Virginia, minister said,

We have closed our minds to such trivial considerations as the question of the resurrection of Christ. If you fundamentalists wish to believe that nonsense, we have no objections, but we have more important things to preach than the presence or absence of an empty tomb 20 centuries old.

When theology and the Bible are interpreted through a pagan feminist grill, and so-called ministers of

⁴⁰ Jones, P. R. (2002). *Sexual Perversion: The Necessary Fruit of Neo-Pagan Spirituality in the Culture at Large*. In W. Grudem (Ed.), *Biblical foundations for manhood and womanhood* (W. Grudem, Ed.). Foundations for the Family Series (261). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

the gospel call the resurrection of Christ a “trivial” thing then truly they have passed out of any category of Christianity, and have totally abandoned any hope of salvation. People in churches or divinity schools like these should understand that it is for them and their followers that Jesus said of the Pharisees,

Matthew 15:14 “Let them alone; they are blind guides of the blind. And if a blind man guides a blind man, both will fall into a pit.”

The people in these rebellious churches and schools are infidels, unbelievers, heathen. They are infidels in churches and they have leadership positions.

Paul wrote in his second letter to Timothy and said that in the last days we should expect to see people who are “...holding a form of godliness, although they have denied its power?” 2 Tim. 3:5.

My wife and I went to a restaurant recently for lunch. The waiter seated us in a booth. There were two elderly women in the booth behind us. I could not help overhearing their conversation, and I became interested when they began discussing their churches. One of them said, “And forty couples just up and walked out, and took their money with them.”

The other lady said, “Well, our minister is pregnant, and I know she’ll be leaving soon...”

This incident is anecdotal, but it points out that doctrine is not treated as important in many of America’s churches today, unless of course it is multicultural or politically correct. I wondered, have these women not heard of Paul’s instructions to the Corinthian church,

1 Corinthian 14:34 The women are to keep silent in the churches; for they are not permitted to speak, but are to subject themselves, just as the Law also says. 35 If they desire to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is improper for a woman to speak in church.

Has cultural “equality” overruled and replaced the apostolic doctrine? In some churches it has. Nevertheless, we may state unequivocally, the church of Christ is not an androgynous assembly of pagans who come together to experience a mystical oneness. Men and women have distinct roles. Yet to say that men and women have distinct roles both in religion and in society is today considered unenlightened at best and at worst a crime against equality.

Again quoting Peter Jones,

The hard truth is that America is no longer a “Christian” nation. Orthodox rabbi Daniel Lappin, in his book *America’s Real War*, states: “One of the most profound truths about [modern] America is that we are no longer one nation under God.” This subtle anti-Christian shift in modern society recently came out as a sociological “fact.” Said sociologist Alan Wolfe to a group of journalists during a visit to Washington in the spring of 1998: “We’ve gone from a predominantly Christian country to one of religious toleration...⁴¹

And,

Such tolerance and refusal to judge is the seedbed of syncretism, and syncretism is the motor of modern paganism. This much-touted tolerance is not progress toward a more enlightened society, but the postmodern failure to recognize that there is objective truth. If rationalism is dead, the world stands before two “spiritual” answers—the spirituality of the Bible

⁴¹ Jones, P. R. (2002). *Sexual Perversion: The Necessary Fruit of Neo-Pagan Spirituality in the Culture at Large*. In W. Grudem (Ed.), *Biblical foundations for manhood and womanhood* (W. Grudem, Ed.). Foundations for the Family Series (259). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

or the spirituality of paganism, but the tide is with paganism, which fits the postmodern paradigm.⁴²

Churches today are under pressure to adopt the practices of paganism, and secularism. It is a choice to which more and more are succumbing. Churches are standing at the openings of two gates. They will choose one or the other.

The Lord said,

Matthew 7:13 “Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. 14 “For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

Conclusion

Apostasy from Christ is a dreadful choice, and Christians are to be aware of the possibility. Yet it is not necessary, and may be avoided through attention to scripture, and trust in Christ and His work. Be aware of Satan’s devices and deceits in temptation, and be diligent in your work for Christ.

⁴² Ibid., Jones, P. R. (2002).

Providence

Is it Providence or Coincidence?

The Providence of God is mysterious. Just when we think we've identified an instance of it—the certainty gets away from us. For example, I had an appointment with a doctor in Knoxville (in August 2014) and the nurse had scheduled my visit at a different office than the one I usually visit. Before the time came for the appointment we decided to take a drive to the new office to locate it—just to be sure I knew where to go when the appointment time came.

We drove to Knoxville and learned that the new doctor's office was nowhere to be found. We called the number twice to get an explanation but got no answer. We even had a nearby hospital call to locate my doctor's office. They got nothing.

The lady at the hospital recommended we try a nearby office building that had been renovated but still stood empty. She gave us directions. We went, although we had little confidence that we would locate the new office.

As we pulled into the parking lot of the vacant office building another car entered the parking lot behind us. I didn't think anything about it until we both stopped.

The other driver got out of his car I recognized him. He was my doctor. He said he had decided on the spur of the moment to check to see if his new offices had been finished. They hadn't.

I said, "This is amazing. We were just looking for your office."

As he got into this car to leave he said, "Isn't God great?"

Coincidence? God's Providence? Or was it too trivial a thing for God to be bothered with?

We can't be sure. Nevertheless, a small event that has a big effect is a clue that God is at work.

Sometimes things happen to us that—at the time—look like the worst that could possibly happen, but then when we look back on it we see that the whole experience was for the good.

Many times God’s providence is like that. It is like the story of Joseph.

It does not always look favorable

Joseph’s brothers sold him into bondage to Ishmaelites, who then delivered to Potiphar in Egypt where he was a slave. Betrayed by Potiphar’s wife and jailed where he interpreted the dreams of Pharaoh’s cupbearer and baker. This led to his meeting with the Pharaoh for whom he interpreted the dream about the fat cattle and the lean cattle. All this led to his rise to the 2nd highest rank in Egypt and the ability to save his family from the famine.

Surely Joseph thought it was a terrible thing for him to be sold by his own brothers to Ishmaelites, and then delivered into slavery in Egypt.

Later, he saw a different picture.

Genesis 50:19 But Joseph said to them, “Do not be afraid, for am I in God’s place? 20 “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive. 21 “So therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones.” So he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

The guiding principle in God’s providence is His love.

No one is “...in God’s place,” but God.

He sees all; He knows all; He guides all to accomplish His overall purpose.⁴³

⁴³ Romans 8:28.

Creatures may intend to do evil, but no one can defeat God's purpose. God intended to see that Joseph's brothers' evil would—in the end—accomplish good.

Abraham teaches us about providence.

Abraham was the servant of God, a man whose faith in God rose to the level of archetype. He also had a son of his old age whom he loved. But a day came when God decided to test Abraham to learn if Abraham loved his son more than God.

Genesis 22:2 He said, "Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I will tell you." 3 So Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him and Isaac his son; and he split wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him.

This was the classic test of faith. Abraham loved Isaac and he loved God. But did he love Isaac more than God?

Yet, how could Abraham's love and God's love solve this brutal dilemma?

Genesis 22:6 Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son, and he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together. 7 Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, "My father!" And he said, "Here I am, my son." And he said, "Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?"

In these preparations Isaac began to see that something was missing. Where was the sacrifice?

Abraham knew what God had required, but he kept his faith in God's providence.

Genesis 22:8 Abraham said, "God will provide for Himself the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." So the two of them walked on together.

The word "providence" means literally "to see before," and therefore by implication to do something about the situation. In this case, there was already upon Mount Moriah a suitable sacrifice, "a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns" (v 13).⁴⁴

Yet, at this point Abraham had no idea that there was a ram in the bushes, but God knew. Faith required that Abraham trust in God's providence, even if it meant that God would raise Isaac from the dead.

Then in the greatest test of faith as recorded in the scriptures Abraham laid Isaac on the altar, on top of the wood, and took the knife in his hand to slay him. It was then that the angel called to him and said, "Do not stretch out your hand against the lad, and do nothing to him, for now I know that you fear God..." vs, 12.

Genesis 22:13 Then Abraham raised his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him a ram caught in the thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram and offered him up for a burnt offering in the place of his son.

An unbeliever, reading this passage, would say that the process that brought the ram to the thicket where it got caught was entirely natural. And it was a coincidence that Abraham and Isaac happened to arrive there at that time. But Abraham, the man of faith, had been led for three days to this exact spot, and he was in desperate need of Divine help—for the dilemma was great.

44. Elwell, W. A., & Comfort, P. W. (2001). Tyndale Bible dictionary. Tyndale reference library (1092). Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

God does not provide by accident. This is the eternal principle in providence. God provides for our needs. He has seen it from afar and He provides.

The great text on providence in the NT is also set in a context of sacrifice pleasing to God. Paul had reason to commend the Philippians' sacrificial support of his missionary work. To them he stated his unbounded confidence in the providential care of God:

Philippians 4:18 But I have received everything in full and have an abundance; I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God.
19 And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.⁴⁵

The Philippians gave to Paul, and God supplied the Philippians all their needs. We do not understand this to be a *quid pro quo*—something for something—rather, more like the interworking of the organs of the body. Each organ has its own role, its own function, and together all are a unit. In this way God supplies all our needs—both physical and spiritual—because He has foreseen it.

Moreover, there is a difference between our “needs” and our “wants.”

Jesus told His disciples,

Matthew 6:25 “For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? 26 “Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into

⁴⁵ Elwell, W. A., & Comfort, P. W. (2001). *Tyndale Bible dictionary*. Tyndale reference library (1092). Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more than they? 27 “And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life? 28 “And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, 29 yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. 30 “But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith! 31 “Do not worry then, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear for clothing?’ 32 “For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 “But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. 34 “So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

- God provides for the basics of life.
- There is no need to worry about acquiring the things that God provides.

But Christ said, “...seek **FIRST** His kingdom and His righteousness.”

We should think of the kingdom of God in this way: the kingdom of God is first and foremost the rule of God.⁴⁶ His righteousness—emphasis on “His”—is that

⁴⁶ Edersheim, A. (1896). *Vol. 1: The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (267). New York: Longmans, Green, and Co. “According to the Rabbinic views of the time, the terms ‘Kingdom,’ ‘Kingdom of heaven,’ and ‘Kingdom of God’ (in the Targum on Micah 4:7 ‘Kingdom of Jehovah’), were equivalent. In fact, the word ‘heaven’ was very often used instead of ‘God,’ so as to avoid unduly familiarising the ear

which comes to us on the basis of faith—like the faith of Abraham.

Our tendency is to doubt that God provides, or that His instructions are the wisest to follow. This is what we must overcome, and add to that—we should submit to God’s rule.

Providence should not be confused with the counterfeits.

Counterfeit Concepts of Providence

The nonbelieving world has many erroneous ideas about providence. At the heart of every secular proposal about providence is the denial of the personhood of God. In the worldly religions or the secular philosophies there is always some cold principle or force dominating man or clashing with his life. It may be all-pervasive or local. It may be rational or irrational, consistent or arbitrary.

False providences include these,

Fate Countless numbers of people have thought themselves to be trapped by a sometimes fickle and always foreboding fate. “As fate would have it,” they say.

Luck Life is indeed fortuitous at times. Optimists speak of “fortune,” or less solemnly of “luck.” But then, since this is all so impersonal, fortune-tellers arose, and someone dreamed up “lady luck.” [Was the outcome of the Battle of Midway merely the product of luck? The

with the Sacred Name. This, probably, accounts for the exclusive use of the expression ‘Kingdom of Heaven’ in the Gospel by St. Matthew.” And further, “A review of many passages on the subject shows that, in the Jewish mind, the expression ‘Kingdom of Heaven’ referred, not so much to any particular period, as in general to *the Rule of God*—as acknowledged, manifested, and eventually perfected. Very often it is the equivalent for personal acknowledgment of God: the taking upon oneself of the ‘yoke’ of ‘the Kingdom,’ or of the commandments—the former preceding and conditioning the latter.”

producers of the epic movie, *Midway*, thought so. Was it merely fortuitous that the Japanese Zeros were drawn to the extreme lower altitudes and so allowed the American dive bombers to approach the Japanese fleet virtually unopposed. These dive bombers destroyed four Japanese aircraft carriers in the attack and virtually turned the tide of the Second World War. An accident of Luck? I don't think so.]

Serendipity This is the term used by the one who takes credit for unintentional discoveries of good things along the way in life. But he refuses to acknowledge that God was there before him and so he does not give thanks.

History Some Marxist propagandists have championed their cause by saying, "History is on our side." They were appealing to a supposed inevitability of future events that would lead to a Communistic world. "History" in such a statement appears to have taken on a divine dimension. Likewise, when American leaders have affirmed a "manifest destiny" for the United States to be the superior power in the Western hemisphere or in the world at large, the same kind of reasoning is employed.

Progress The development of science and technology, education and social evolution, and territorial conquests have made some people believers in progress as something more than what is seen. Until the two world wars, there was the illusion of a relentless momentum pushing upward and onward forever. In some respects, progress is but providence by another name, but not to the degree that people assume for themselves the glory that belongs to God.

Nature Men like Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau of 19th-century New England attributed to nature the gifts of providence. But nature is impersonal and abstract. There is no "Mother Nature."

Natural Selection and the Survival of the Fittest Charles Darwin's classic on biological evolution, *The Origin of the Species*, appeared in 1859. It popularized

two relatively new theories. For millions of people, the mysterious decisions behind “natural selection” intrigued the thoughtful more than the notion of God’s providence. And the idea that “the fit survive” necessarily makes providence altogether unnecessary.

These counterfeit views compete with the idea of God’s providence. Of course, they cannot all be true. Nor can they satisfy the inquirer whose personhood calls insistently for a personal providence that reflects a knowledge of his individual needs and uniqueness. Only the Christian doctrine of providence provides that.⁴⁷

God provides for us spiritually.

He provides rules to live by.

People do not know right from wrong as a result of birth. It’s not genetic. Moral instruction is essential to guide people through life, and to enable them to avoid the pitfalls and conflicts that arise because of human lust and greed. This may be seen in a controversy over the Ten Commandments.

There is the story of four men who held up a grocery store in Louisville, Kentucky, and in the process shot and killed two policemen. When the men were brought to trial, their lawyer noticed a copy of the Ten Commandments on the wall near the jury box.

“Judge Hayes,” said the attorney, “that framed reproduction of the Commandments is detrimental to this trial. I request that it be removed lest it adversely influence this jury.” Some people present observed that among the Commandments were these: “Thou shalt not steal”; “Thou shalt not kill.”

The judge said he did not believe the document would prejudice the trial and refused to have the

47 Elwell, W. A., & Comfort, P. W. (2001). Tyndale Bible dictionary. Tyndale reference library (1092). Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

Decalogue removed from the courtroom. So, the Commandments remained in the display for all to see.⁴⁸

It is odd that in this life there are people who don't know that their adversity comes from violation of the very thing that could prevent their troubles. Had these four robbers but followed the Commandments⁴⁹ they would not have been on trial for murder, and two police officers would have remained alive.

For the Christian there is only one way to escape the trials of life, and that is to steer a straight course through them. James wrote in his letter,

James 1:2 Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. 4 And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

The Christian's faith provides a way through the trials, and temptations. Sometimes the things we consider trials are what God has sent to cause us to change course.

Providence in the London fire

Art Cashin, Director of Floor Operations at UBS, told a story about a massive fire that broke out in the city of London, England on September 2, 1666. It began in a bakery on Pudding Lane, which was on the East End (between London Bridge and the Tower). The fire spread quickly into the shop next door. That shop sold ship's goods, especially tar and turpentine. The building not only caught fire, it exploded, raining flaming tar down on the wooden buildings in the neighborhood.

At first the authorities dismissed it as a local blaze. The wind had other ideas, however. Strong gusts of wind whipped up the fire and soon the flames were spreading

⁴⁸ Tan, P. L. (1996). Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times. Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc.

⁴⁹ The Sabbath law is an obvious exception. Author.

across the city. By mid-morning the next day much of the city was on fire and much of the populace had taken to boats and barges on the Thames.

The king called for a team of Navy gun experts to blow up blocks of buildings to form a firebreak. The strategy worked and after raging three days, the fire burned itself out. The devastation, however, was huge. Nearly 500 acres of the city was burned to ashes. An estimated 15,000 homes and nearly 100 churches were fully destroyed leaving 100,000 homeless. Amazingly, the human death toll was set at 10.

Under the rubric of, “It’s an ill wind that blows no good” the disaster was, in fact, a blessing in disguise. The year before, nearly 100,000 Londoners had died of the Plague. A new outbreak had been feared but the fire destroyed the rat hovels where the plague-bearing fleas had thrived. After the Great Fire, the Plague virtually disappeared. No one realized it at the time but the fire saved the city.⁵⁰

Sometimes there is a blessing in trials.
Paul said in his letter to the Philippians,

Philippians 1:12 Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, 13 so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole praetorian guard and to everyone else, 14 and that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear.

- Sometimes good comes from adversity.
- Adversity happens for a reason.

In Acts Chapter 17 we are told that Paul and Silas came to Thessalonica to preach the gospel and they

⁵⁰ 2014 by King World News®. September 3, 2014.

made converts both among the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles. But we read in the 5th verse that,

Acts 17:5 ... the Jews, becoming jealous and taking along some wicked men from the market place, formed a mob and set the city in an uproar; and attacking the house of Jason, they were seeking to bring them out to the people. 6 When they did not find them, they began dragging Jason and some brethren before the city authorities, shouting, "These men who have upset the world have come here also; 7 and Jason has welcomed them, and they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus."

Adversity seems to follow people who want to embrace the kingdom of God, or to extend its rule.

Acts 17:10 The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. 1 Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so. 12 Therefore many of them believed, along with a number of prominent Greek women and men.

Paul and his companions suffered great adversity as they went about preaching the gospel. But great good came out of their preaching.

God's providence leads many to salvation
Peter wrote in his first letter,

1 Peter 4:14 If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

And in the same letter he said,

1 Peter 1:6 In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, 7 so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; 8 and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, 9 obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.

In a book entitled the Search for the Twelve Apostles—which is excerpted below from an online article—we can read of the Apostle Peter’s final days, “Of the final days of the apostle Peter in Rome, Jowett wrote that Peter was cast into a horrible prison called the Mamertine and for nine months, in absolute darkness, he endured monstrous torture manacled to a post. In spite of all the suffering Peter was subjected to, he converted his jailers, Processus, Martinianus, and forty-seven others. Peter met his death at the hand of the Romans in Nero’s circus, 67 AD.”⁵¹

Adversity, yes, because it was the price of saving souls.

God’s providence in Christ

God foreordained the coming of Christ, and in His foreordination He included the sufferings of Christ. God determined His suffering to be fitting to perfect Him as the author of man’s salvation. The glorification of man in Christ is God’s providence.

⁵¹ Source: The Search For The Twelve Apostles, William McBirnie, PH.D – biblepath.com

1 Peter 1:10 As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that *would come* to you made careful searches and inquiries, 11 seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow. 12 It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things into which angels long to look.

When the Jewish authorities insisted that the Romans crucify Jesus they meant to do evil. They coveted their control of the beliefs of the people, and they jealously guarded their place and their nation.

But God meant it for good, not only for them but for all men. And so through God's providence in the offering of His Son...

Titus 2:11 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, 12 instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and Godly in the present age, 13 looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, 14 who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.

Make the choice to trust in God's providence.