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Have you ever thought of distributing The Reformation Herald among those you meet or already know? More and more, this magazine is being designed to answer the real spiritual hunger of people in today's society, tapping into the exact train of thought being triggered by current events. As Bible prophecy unfolds before our eyes, why not keep some of these magazines on hand in a large ziplock bag, ready to share with honest, thinking people who fear God and are eager to know what in the world is going on?

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"The greatest want of the world is the want of men—men who will not be bought or sold."—Education, p. 57.

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COVID-19: A NAME THAT CHANGED THE WORLD

Dear reader: The events are moving faster than we can write. All of a sudden, the world has been stormed by an invisible antagonist called COVID 19. **"The world and all that's in it—our way of life as individuals and as citizens of the nations; our families and our jobs; our trade and commerce and money; our educational systems and our religions and our cultures; even the badges of our national identity, which most of us have always taken for granted—all will have been powerfully and radically altered forever. No one can be exempted from its effects. No sector of our lives will remain untouched."**¹ I think this is exactly how the people feel about being locked down in their homes without any certain perspective, watching the demoralizing news.

Were these words written in 2020? Actually, no. The above text was published in 1990 by Malachi Martin, as he unveiled the unabashed agenda of the most powerful religious and political institution on earth. The text is from his best-selling book, *The Keys of This Blood*.

While COVID-19 is not the subject of Martin's work, the actions taken by governments of the world in response to the pandemic, reflect a profound degree of similarity to the changes that would take place as part of this agenda.

The pain and suffering are beyond any imagination. Just to put that in perspective, at the time of this writing, 18 million people in New

York locked in their own home, a similar situation is happening right now with almost 20 million people in the city of Los Angeles, California. Some pray, some are scared, some are confused, some don't even know if this is a movie or reality, and some don't even know what to do. Nothing is like before. Things are changing rapidly. The world's dynamics are decelerating to the point of the "Ice Age." We are motionless; few are still processing the calamity. The cities' nightlife is replaced with a cold silence. What's next?

The prophetic eye takes us to the pinnacle of Zion envisioning, like Moses, the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Definitely, what has happened recently has changed us almost in an almost irreversible fashion. From an objective biblical basis, this event can be interpreted as one of the troublesome signs of the last days that immediately precede the second coming of Christ. In the wise words of Jesus: "Now learn a parable of the fig tree; When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh: So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors" (Matthew 24:32, 33).

My fellow believers: It does not matter who we are. It does not matter even how much money our bank account holds anymore. We are just about to witness the greatest, most glorious event of all times, the return of our most dear Saviour Jesus

Christ. My heart is thrilled. We are heading home, dear people, and I am so ready to meet my long-time Friend. We all need to prepare for this trip to the throne of God meeting our Heavenly Father, on the glassy sea, for the first time and forever.

"Courage, fortitude, faith, and implicit trust in God's power to save do not come in a moment. These heavenly graces are acquired by the experience of years. By a life of holy endeavor and firm adherence to the right the children of God were sealing their destiny. Beset with temptations without number, they knew they must resist firmly or be conquered. They felt that they had a great work to do, and at any hour they might be called to lay off their armor; and should they come to the close of life with their work undone, it would be an eternal loss. They eagerly accepted the light from heaven, as did the first disciples from the lips of Jesus. When those early Christians were exiled to mountains and deserts, when left in dungeons to die with hunger, cold, and torture, when martyrdom seemed the only way out of their distress, they rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer for Christ, who was crucified for them. Their worthy example will be a comfort and encouragement to the people of God who will be brought into the time of trouble such as never was."²

We live in solemn times. Cosmic powers collide, Christ is annihilating the power of darkness and allowing the people to choose eternal life or eternal damnation. On which side are you going to be? *R*

References:

- ¹ Martin, Malachi: *The Keys of This Blood*, p. 15. Simon & Schuster, 1990.
² *Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 213.

HAS SOCIETY IMPEACHED GOD?



REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS AND PRINCIPLES

In 1776 in the New World, humans were not trusted with being infallible. After centuries of rule by the experts of Europe, the founders of what would become the leading nation of the free world could see that politically powerful people sometimes struggle with distinguishing between what is good for all the people and what is good for the powerful people. It is dangerous to let a human have political and religious power.

These founders created a government that would be directed by the majority of the citizens of the country. Whoever could communicate the interests of the people best, would likely receive political power. But the founders placed many limits on those who receive political power. Some of those limits, such as division of powers, provided authority for a term of only a few years, and provided for impeachment.

But the greatest limit on political power was the agreement that morality and decency were determined not by majorities but by a Higher Wisdom. Every citizen and every ruler was subject to a higher law than what could be created in statute books and from the judicial bench. The expression “no one is above the law” is well known. The

word “law” in the expression referred not only to the laws made by the majority of people through the legislative branch of government, but also to so-called Natural Law. The founders used terms like “self-evident” to refer to the discovery of truths too objective to be chosen by the majority. They talked about nature and nature’s God. Certain *rights* were held to be higher in authority than any political vote. Religion and the press were placed outside of the jurisdiction of the government because they were in the service of Someone more authoritative than any democracy. The founding documents of the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution derived their authority from sources independent of humanity.

How different would have been a Declaration of Independence rooted only in democracy! Instead of self-evident truths, it might have come from the highest polled political opinions. The argument might have been presented to the British that their government was being left because a majority vote carried the day. But there is no pretense that this sprung from the sway of human opinion. Instead, it was the recognition of a higher definition of justice. America was holding the English to account for being unjust even if the

majority wanted the injustice. Essential to the origin of the nation was the acceptance of rights that are an independent and objective truth set by God and unable to be altered by any vote of humanity.

When truth is established through democracy there is no higher authority to hold the mob back; there is no protection for the minority and there ceases to be any human rights. For all rights are a recognition of truths that transcend any democratic authority.

An acceptance of this higher wisdom required the citizens of that newly-formed nation to accept each other as equally the children of the same Creator. No political faction was absolutely accurate, and there was room for improvement in all. Truth was not created by the consensus of a majority but accepted as the wisdom of an Omniscient Father. The humility of recognizing an independent and objective “self-evident” truth that all must submit to equally prevented the people from endlessly persecuting those that disagreed with them. For it is a fundamental fact that humans will destroy each other as they divide against each other unless a spiritual power holds back raw impulses in subjection to a non-human higher authority. There is no other possibility.

TODAY'S WORLD

Today we are assured by our contemporaries that the Christian God was a fraud of the times accepted by only some benighted and cruel founding fathers. We are typically asked not merely to respect, but to more fully appreciate non-Christian religions with their own morality. We are told that morality is nothing more than whatever we decide it to be and that we should make room for the moralities of the newcomers. Of course, those that argue such ideas do not completely believe their own arguments. No one wishes to roll back laws against murder and theft just because a majority might back such initiatives. In fact, it was the moralities of those other religions that perpetuated the class systems and endless violence that has plagued our planet for its existence.

The contemporary problem is not that we are diverse and technology allows us to ignore each other and colonize online into homogenous groups. The problem of modern society is that we have impeached God and there is nothing left to prevent us from using naked political power to destroy ourselves as we try to force the rest of the world to be more like ourselves and less like themselves.

As a society, we have impeached God and now we suffer the consequences. Why did we "fire" the Creator? There is no one single answer. No trial was ever held. Witnesses were often brought but never cross-examined. Documents were presented but never tested and shown to be unbiased and honest. Decades have witnessed the constant attack on the Founder of the Universe and few have really addressed the legitimate merits of the arguments for or against His impeachment.

Had formal articles been drawn up, perhaps they might look something like this:

"For failure to prevent and eliminate evil in our world; for inattention to the needs of each person and animal on the planet, the God of Christian Revelation is hereby impeached with any of His ideas and all of His demands."

With such an article of impeachment before humanity, each injury and frustration is blamed on the Divine. Every human complaint is treated as a bona fide reason for the rejection of God.

Of course, any honest examination of this impeachment would have to ask whether there was any other source of evil, any other contributor. Did God sufficiently define morality and immorality? Did He warn us of evil and its consequences? Does evil have a promoter all its own? Have we as humans rejected God and intentionally chosen evil and then blamed God for our own choices? These questions demand attention if we are to examine whether God should be in control of our own conscience and life trajectory or be impeached. Any idea of impeaching God is serious and should be taken with all the seriousness that it demands. But our world rushes on, rejoicing in making God apparently irrelevant . . . at least until we suffer the consequences of our own actions. Having rejected a neutral referee, we are left to the reality that there is no right or wrong left in the world except by consensus. And humans with their natural predisposition to do evil, will never reach a consensus against all evil. Some will oppose theft, others will defend it. Some will oppose lying, others will defend it. Each temptation will have some who try to protect it.

When there is no greater authority than crowds and mobs, those mobs become violent. Hateful words and cruel actions are the natural tools of those insecure in the discovery of truth. The heat of argument and cruelty is used to cover up for the absence of the light of truth and reason. When others are not able to see it our way, we are prone to "help" them to see. And that propensity to force "help" upon others endlessly divides us until we ourselves will be conquered.

SOME THOUGHTS TO PONDER

A divided population in any nation or body of nations is doomed to

self-destruct unless it can hire an independent and objective God again to define and maintain morality. This God must not be the state, for free nations believe in the separation of church and state. A state that defines and forces its own brand of religion is a cruel tyrant. No, we need just such a God as the one that has been impeached.

Unfortunately, many churches have failed us here. Instead of reminding us of a transcendent God, they have taught a God that makes us feel good, much like Santa Claus. Give God a few prayers and cookies and milk and He should be good for a pay raise at work and a couple of healings in the family. This is a cheap god, unworthy of admiration and submission. Churches have failed us and preachers have misled us. But God is not what comes out of a preacher's mouth or a church's theological department.

Above all our pettiness, there stands a benevolent, interested, awful, majestic Wisdom. He declares what is right and what is wrong. He creates human rights and keeps accurate track of human wrongs. He patiently waits while we make a terrible mess of His creation and demonstrate our ingratitude for His grace. He offers to work for us, if we will only hire Him. He will set this world straight and punish those that have ruined His work. He will triumph before long. A good examination of the Bible, not to distort and reject it, but to consider the qualifications of its God for being hired to maintain morality is our only hope for the future. In submission to a Higher Being, we can abandon the desperate war on our fellow humans. We are not in charge of determining or defending truth. But we can demonstrate what it means to find that truth and be made free by that truth. We can demonstrate a holier, happier life than the current climate fosters. Let us pledge ourselves to this noble cause. *R*

BY Walter Lukic

THE WORLD'S MORAL COMPASS

| Part 2 of 2

INTRODUCTION

In the first part of this article we took a closer look into the history of ideas and theories that have shaped the contemporary view of human sexuality, gender, and family relations. We saw that the prevailing theories of our time are rooted in the humanistic worldview that rejects the supremacy of divine revelation and relies on the human mind as the ultimate source and arbiter of moral conduct. We learned that this worldview was promoted by certain ancient Greek philosophers and was affirmed by the rationalistic thinkers of the Enlightenment period.

The humanistic worldview has spawned a host of related philosophies that have become the guiding lights of our age. All of them agree on one thing: they believe that there is no absolute truth, but all truth is relative. Their notion is that moral values, therefore, are not permanently established by some higher authority but are discovered by thinking humans. "Man is the measure of all things," is their watchword.

We also established that this worldview is not new at all. It originated with the father of lies who approached a lovely young lady in a

beautiful garden and offered to her supposedly superior knowledge and experience if she questioned God's authority and asserted her own moral autonomy. Both the man and the woman then doubted the word of God and assumed the divine prerogative of defining the ultimate reality—good and evil. They transgressed God's explicit command, lost their original innocence and holiness, and hurled humanity into the abyss of sin—spiritual, mental, and physical degradation leading to death.

What we witness in contemporary society and culture is only the fruit of that primeval rebellion of humanity against their Creator. In our time this rebellion has almost reached the terminus point of divine forbearance. We live in an age when men and women have dared to redefine the concepts of sex and gender—the fundamental identity markers of human beings—as well as the nature of marriage, the basic social institution established by God. In this article we will focus on some visible manifestations of these dramatic changes that bring confusion in the minds of our youth and pose an unprecedented threat to the entire society, especially to Christians who conscientiously obey the Word of God.

THE PROMISE OF FREEDOM

It is quite interesting to observe that the first lie used on Eve in the Garden of Eden has never lost its appeal to her sons and daughters. The essence of that lie is the promise of something better, especially freedom from restrictions which, we are told, the Creator supposedly imposed on His creatures arbitrarily.

We might be surprised to discover that many "freedoms" with which we are so familiar today, are only recent creations of modern media, academia, courts of law, and legislatures. Some of these "freedoms" and the accompanying social changes promoted by various interest groups and movements have been so disruptive to the established moral and social norms that these changes have been called "revolutions." Here we will mention some of the more notable ones.

CHANGING ATTITUDES ON HUMAN SEXUALITY – THE SEXUAL REVOLUTION

The first half of the 20th century had not yet witnessed a major assault on the traditional values governing physical intimacy and marital relations. In western culture, that

period could rather be described as a calm before the storm. But the decade between 1945 and 1955 introduced a change. The Sexual Revolution began in that period and with it, a traditional consensus on sexuality started to erode.

J.S. Feinberg and P.D. Feinberg in their *Ethics for a Brave New World*, a major work on the contemporary ethical issues from a conservative Protestant viewpoint, identify six major factors that have decisively shifted our culture's attitude toward sexuality:

"The first is *secularism*. This is the view that *God* must be removed from all areas of human thought and activity. One of the outworkings of this belief has been a move to value-free sex education in our schools. . . . Without divine absolutes governing sexuality, one is left to personal preferences."¹

Privatization is a second factor. First in the West and then in most parts of the world, it has become common to view one's sexual preferences as one's own business in which neither the state nor the church should interfere. *Scientific frankness* is yet another factor. Sigmund Freud taught that inhibition of sexual expression has psychologically harmful effects. Freud and his followers alleged, therefore, that by throwing off the restraint imposed in early childhood and by exploring unconscious, we can neutralize our obsessions and gain psychological benefit.

Media exposure is recognized as a fourth factor. The 20th century witnessed dramatic scientific and technological advances in the field of public communication. Through the printed page, radio, television, and later digital media, people of all ages could be reached at any place and at any time. And seldom do we encounter such media without being exposed to a morally offensive image. It is an undeniable fact that internet and digital media have played a major role in making the lewd content universally accessible. Various forms of sexual permissiveness that earlier in the twentieth century were unthinkable, in the second half of that same century

have become commonplace. It has become obvious that this permissive media culture has anesthetized modern society to the idea that any of this might be wrong. Yet the media exposure of children and youth to such offensive and mind-polluting content has had a tremendously detrimental effect on the moral development of young men and women.

As a fifth factor influencing the public attitude on human sexuality is called *existential schizophrenia*. To put it simply this phrase means that "reality and personal meaning have been divorced."² Real are the things and processes that are measurable and verifiable. Other things, like love and purpose, have only personal meaning and are not real. The consequence of such thinking triggers divorce between values and behavior. A value such as "love" has only personal meaning and its application is left to an individual. "In the case of sexual ethics, the divorce between value and behavior leads to sex simply for personal gratification without any thought of the other person."³

As a sixth factor are mentioned *therapeutic values*. When a counselor provides his or her professional services to a client, the counsellor is accepting, sympathetic, and shows understanding. Therefore, to win the confidence and gain the client's cooperation, the counsellor avoids judgmental language and is reluctant to condemn the client's expression of his or her needs as wrong.

However, this valuable therapeutic and pastoral approach in dealing with individual clients at certain stages of the counselling process, is not suitable in dealing with ethical issues of a society as a whole. Therapeutic methods cannot be divorced from moral obligation. "If they are, one becomes accepting of any behavior whether it is right or wrong."⁴ Christ is our perfect example in applying this method properly: He did not condemn the woman caught in adultery, but He also did not let her continue in the sinful way of life. "Neither do I condemn thee; go, and sin no more" (John 8:11).

Among some additional factors that influenced attitudes on physical intimacy we could also mention the availability of certain novel methods of birth control. While both pragmatic and biblical considerations have led many Christians to conclude that birth control is morally acceptable, it is important to stress that the increasing use of certain birth control devices (like the oral contraceptive pill) coincided with the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s and also with a significant rise in venereal (sexually transmitted) diseases.⁵ It is noteworthy that in the 1960s the pills were available only by doctors' prescription and were supplied only to married women.

PREMARITAL PHYSICAL INTIMACY

It is impossible to sow the seeds of moral corruption in the human mind without reaping the whirlwind of morally offensive human conduct. Premarital physical intimacy and people of all ages cohabiting before marriage became mainstream practices in the second half of the twentieth century. Survey after survey evidence the change in attitude toward physical intimacy before marriage and in its prevalence.

The special report on ethics that appeared in December 9, 1985 issue of *U.S. News and World Report* among other, had this question: "Is it wrong for a man and a woman to have sexual relations before marriage?" Thirty-six percent said it was wrong, but 61 percent found the practice morally acceptable. It is noteworthy that the youngest age group questioned was even more agreeable, with a 78% approval rate.

More recent data show even greater acceptance of premarital physical intimacy: Data from the 2002 survey indicate that by age 20, 75% of the respondents had had premarital physical intimacy; by age 44, 95% of respondents were physically intimate before marriage.⁶

Another practice evidencing a major moral erosion was a dramatic increase of people cohabiting before marriage. In the period of about 24

years, between 1970 and 1994, the number of unmarried couples living together rose from around 500,000 to nearly 3.7 million. As of early 2002, more than 4 million couples were cohabiting, and that does not even include gay couples. Between 1980 and 1984, some 44 percent of marriages came after cohabiting, and it was estimated that half of all couples who married after 1985 began by cohabiting with their partner.⁷

The main objective of this article is not to provide a full exposition of the biblical teaching on premarital physical intimacy. Let us only briefly mention that the Bible condemns any physical intimacy unless that intimacy exists between two people of opposite sex joined by marriage. Premarital sex and prostitution are condemned in both Testaments. Premarital intimacy and adultery are condemned in the Old Testament: Exo. 20:14; 22:16, 17; Lev. 18:20; 20:10, 14; 21:13; Deut. 22:15, 17, 20, 21; Prov. 23:27. The New Testament likewise condemns those practices in 1 Cor. 5:1; 6:9, 13, 18; Eph. 5:3; 1 Thess. 4:3–8. The following scriptures in both Testaments prohibit prostitution or harlotry: Lev. 19:29; 20:5, 6 (here in connection with idols); Deut. 23:18; Prov. 23:27; 1 Cor. 6:13–18.

Only Bible-believing Christians still use the adjective “premarital” for physical intimacy before marriage. Most Americans do not tie the access to physical intimacy to the institution of marriage. Thirty or forty years ago that issue was presented to the young men and women in public educational institutions. Not anymore. There has been such redefinition of sex in academia, in the media and in the public consciousness that there are no expectations on the part of most Americans to abide by the old rules of conduct.

Adultery was also redefined. The gurus with scientific credentials had come out, like Alfred Kinsey, William Masters and Virginia Johnson, and just because these people were wearing white coats and because they published the results of their research as a fully objective argument based on clinical studies, many people in the latter part of the

20th century took the result of their research seriously. Many believed that these results testified of a necessary moral revolution. But these researchers had an agenda or—to put it more accurately—it was a personal agenda. Driven by that agenda, these researchers carried out a massive misrepresentation of the reality. The point is that their arguments stuck.

THE REVOLUTION OF DIVORCE

Until the middle of 20th century, all major Christian denominations were generally opposed to divorce.

“The first modern no-fault divorce law was enacted in Russia in December 1917 following the October Revolution of the same year. Regarding marriage as a bourgeois institution, the new government transferred divorce jurisdiction from the Russian Orthodox Church to the state courts, which could grant it on application of either spouse.”⁸

In the U.S., the first “no-fault divorce” was signed into law only in 1969. With a law adopted in 1969, California became the first U.S. state to permit no-fault divorce.

“In 1969, Governor Ronald Reagan of California made what he later admitted was one of the biggest mistakes of his political life. Seeking to eliminate the strife and deception often associated with the legal regime of fault-based divorce, Reagan signed the nation’s first no-fault divorce bill. . . . But no-fault divorce also gutted marriage of its legal power to bind husband and wife, allowing one spouse to dissolve a marriage for any reason—or for no reason at all.

“In the decade and a half that followed, virtually every state in the Union followed California’s lead and enacted a no-fault divorce law of its own. This legal transformation was only one of the more visible signs of the divorce revolution then sweeping the United States: From 1960 to 1980, the divorce rate more than doubled—from 9.2 divorces per 1,000 married women to 22.6 divorces per 1,000 married women. This meant that while less than 20%

of couples who married in 1950 ended up divorced, about 50% of couples who married in 1970 did. And approximately half of the children born to married parents in the 1970s saw their parents part, compared to only about 11% of those born in the 1950s.”⁹

No-fault divorce has quickly spread throughout the world. Australia adopted no-fault divorce in 1975 with the enactment of the *Family Law Act 1975*. The only ground for divorce in that country is when there is an irretrievable breakdown of marriage, evidenced by a twelve-month separation. In Canada before 1968, the only grounds for divorce were adultery or cruelty. The Divorce Act was amended in 1968 to permit other grounds for divorce, including separation for at least 3 years. The amendments in 1986 reduced the separation period to one year, with no requirement to prove “fault” by either spouse. In 1976 Germany eliminated the *Schuldprinzip* (“principle of guilt”) to make no-fault divorces the standard. With the adoption of the *New Marriage Law*, China allowed no-fault divorce already in 1950, yet it was only since the 1980s that no-fault divorce has become much more common in China.

When the *Family Law Act* was passed in California 1969, that act was hailed as a major benefit for the family because the family would be spared public humiliation. Historically, in the Christian West, divorce was permitted only when it could be demonstrated that one of the spouses had committed adultery. But no-fault divorce has led to the most rampant destruction of family in the modern age. No-fault divorce separated any biblical grounds for divorce, like adultery, from legal grounds for divorce. The natural consequences of immoral human actions that had governed the human society for centuries were suddenly swept away.

The evangelical tolerance of no-fault divorce was a major betrayal of the family by the Christian community. This position of lifestyle divorce and divorce culture further weakened the Christian churches’ ability to intervene and forestall



God can save every one of His children even in this adulterous and sinful generation, everyone who comes to Him by faith and in repentance. Jesus gives the power to “go and sin no more.”

even greater erosion of moral and family values. The churches lost their ability to know how and when to respond to the onslaught of perverse moral culture.

Again, we will not argue here for the biblical view on divorce and remarriage. Let us only affirm that the Bible teaches consistently how God joined and blessed the union between a man and a woman and that this union which we call marriage can be dissolved only by the death of one of the spouses. Divorce is allowed, but not mandated, only if one of the spouses commits adultery. However, remarriage is not permitted as long as the divorced spouse is alive. Scriptural evidence for this position is found in Genesis 1:27; 2:24; Mark 10:2–12; Luke 16:18; Matt. 19:3–12; Rom. 7:1–3; 1 Cor. 7:1–24.

THE REVOLUTION OF ABORTION

It is likely that no moral issue in the U.S. generates more controversy than the issue of abortion. Since the landmark *Roe v. Wade* decision of the U.S. Supreme Court on January 22, 1973, legalizing induced abortion on demand,¹⁰ between 1973 and 2016 more than 45 million legal abortions have been performed in the U.S.¹¹

This number is much higher according to some other estimates (compare, e.g., the CDC Surveillance Report for 2014 with Allan

Guttmacher Institute report for the same year).¹²

It is true that the number of abortions performed in the U.S. has been in decline since 1990s. At its peak in 1990, there were total of 1,429,247 abortions. The ratio of legally induced abortions to live births increased from 196 abortions per 1,000 live births in 1973 to 358 abortions per 1,000 live births in 1979. Nevertheless, according to the Guttmacher Institute report, there were still about 926,200 abortions performed in the U.S. in 2014 (or 652, 639 according to CDC). This decline in induced abortions is primarily due to a more widespread use of various methods of birth control.

The statistical data reveal another troubling fact. Lawrence B. Finer published in 2005 a study on the reasons U.S. women have abortions. The study results revealed that most abortions are “elective” or, in other words, that having a child was inconvenient to the pregnant women: “The reasons most frequently cited were that having a child would interfere with a woman’s education, work or ability to care for dependents (74%); that she could not afford a baby now (73%); and that she did not want to be a single mother or was having relationship problems (48%).”¹³

Data from Florida reveal that out of about 70,000 legally induced abortions in 2018, less than 1.5 percent of the abortions were in

cases where a woman’s physical health was threatened, fewer than 2 percent were in cases where a woman cited psychological-health problems, and fewer than .3 percent were in cases where a woman’s life was in danger. One percent of the cases involved serious fetal abnormalities. Only .14 percent of women reported having obtained an abortion due to having been raped, and only .01 percent took place in cases of incest.¹⁴

It is beyond the scope of this article to demonstrate how utterly reprehensible and harmful is any form of induced abortion except in a very limited number of cases when the life of a mother is at stake. The central question in the abortion debate is when life and personhood begin. In our judgment, the developing baby is a human being and also qualifies as a person. Abortion as currently promoted and practiced made possible sexual irresponsibility and sexual sin in such a way that it removed—besides the eternal—also the temporal consequences of Biblically illicit physical intimacy.

THE HOMOSEXUAL REVOLUTION AND SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

Just over fifty years ago (June 28, 1969) the Stonewall Riots erupted in New York City, signaling the beginning of the organized gay rights

movement. It came on the heels of the sexual revolution, the feminist movement, redefinition of marriage on the terms of no-fault divorce, and driven by the cultural propellants sharing the same worldview. Historians and sociologists of moral change point to the moral revolution on the issue of homosexuality in the U.S. and in Europe as to the highest velocity moral revolution in recorded history.

This revolution could not have taken place unless the moral and spiritual foundations of the society had not eroded and crumbled—in other words, unless the society at large has become secularized and divorced from the binding authority of the Word of God. It is true that a significant number of influential people and government institutions have been involved in promoting redefinition of the fundamental moral values and relationships in human society (the courts, legislatures, academia and media). Notwithstanding substantial funding and untiring research work, no scientific study has conclusively demonstrated that biological foundation (“same-sex gene”) determines the same-sex orientation.

These tectonic changes in the moral fabric of the society are justified on the grounds that the rights of minorities need to be protected from the oppressive moral judgment of the majority. At the beginning of the 21st century, one after another, Western and traditionally Christian countries, have legalized same-sex marriage. Presently, there are 28 countries in the world in which same-sex marriage is available.

If we redefine marriage to be something other than what it is defined to be by the Creator in Genesis 2 and affirmed by Jesus Christ in Mark 10, then we face a fundamental problem—marriage can be virtually anything that the majority of humans or an influential minority manipulating the majority might happen to decide.

What has become the rational basis for the modern definition of marriage?—It is a consensual relationship of two consenting adults. The last moral principle that most Americans claim to adhere to when

it comes to sexual morality is consent. When there is no consent, then there might be some sort of sexual offense, or some sort of sexual indiscretion. Whatever the consenting adults do, this is protected by the laws of privacy, and this is outside of the moral and legal sanction of the society. The secularized society has abandoned the biblical morality, but it has yet to find some morality. And the only morality that they can find is now based on consent.

THE TRANSGENDER REVOLUTION

The May 29, 2014 issue of *Time* magazine published Katy Steinmetz' article, “The Transgender Tipping Point” (America's next civil rights frontier).¹⁵

In the opening paragraphs the author sets the agenda:

“Almost one year after the Supreme Court ruled that Americans were free to marry the person they loved, no matter their sex, another civil rights movement is poised to challenge long-held cultural norms and beliefs. Transgender people—those who identify with a gender other than the sex they were ‘assigned at birth,’ to use the preferred phrase among trans activists—are emerging from the margins to fight for an equal place in society. . . .

“But perhaps the biggest obstacle is that trans people live in a world largely built on a fixed and binary definition of gender. In many places, they are unwelcome in the men's bathroom and the women's. The effect is a constant reminder that they don't belong. . . .

“Understanding why someone would feel that way requires viewing sex and gender as two separate concepts—sex is biological, determined by a baby's birth anatomy; gender is cultural, a set of behaviors learned through human interaction. . . . Sexual preferences, meanwhile, are a separate matter altogether. There is no concrete correlation between a person's gender identity and sexual interests; a heterosexual woman, for instance, might start living as a man and still be attracted to men.”¹⁶

To understand the language of this article and of the contemporary discourse on gender identity, we need to learn a new vocabulary. For example, the word “transgender” is an umbrella term “for all rejections of the norm”—the sex assigned at birth. The word “cisgender” (or “cissexual”) designates all people whose gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth.

As we may see from this perplexing confusion created by the moral architects of the “brave new world,” the moral norms and standards of the society have gathered such a speed and magnitude that we cannot anymore talk about the sexual revolution but rather of a sexual anarchy. Those involved in the work of teaching the children and youth and pastoring churches are daily faced with a list of moral issues that grows longer and longer. The acronyms of the organizations advocating the rights of sexual minorities are constantly expanding (currently we are at “LGBTQ”). This open-ended revolution just invites people to say, “I am next.”

And if we think for a moment about the root problem of this immense confusion, we can easily find it. The transgender movement creates this great problem in society and in the Christian community because of its rejection of Genesis 2 and 3: God made us male and female.

The gender identity is one of the most widespread and profound challenges to Bible-believing communities: Here we deal not only with the problem of what someone “does”—the fact that someone may deviate from the biblical standards for sexual conduct. Here we deal with the problem of how someone presents himself or herself in the terms of gender identity. Christian institutions that have guidelines and policies on sexual conduct need urgently to revise these documents.

“If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?” (Psalm 11:3.)

Only Christianity that is based on the teachings of God's Word can withstand these moral challenges and consistently hold the high ground. Apart from the Bible,

there is no other binding authority, no compelling reason to defend traditional Christian morality and to pay the high social cost and bear the stigma of politically incorrect views. And soon we will see who in the Christian community is prepared to stand for the truth and take the position that may not be popular.

There is a dilemma before us: Shall we change the rules of sexual morality or shall we abandon the Gospel of Jesus Christ as revealed in His Word? It is impossible to present the good news of the gospel to those who do not see their sinful condition nor our need for pardon and divine transforming power. The basic biblical presupposition is that we do not know why we need the Saviour until we understand that we are sinners.

And the Bible logic is this: We understand that we are sinners not just because we are told that we are sinners, but because our sin is made visible to us in the clear teachings of the law of God as recorded in the Scriptures. Therefore, we cannot say that we do not know that we are sinners. If we redefine something that the Bible says is sin and we say is not sin, according to the Bible we in fact mislead people concerning their



When academia and media, or perhaps even our children, come to us and ask us about the existence of different sexual orientations and gender identities and if they argue that this is a fact of nature, what shall we tell them?

The most proper answer is the answer Christ gave to the Jews who tempted Him with their question on divorce and remarriage: “But from the beginning it was not so” (Matthew 19:8).



need for Jesus. This has devastating consequences for eternity.

Parents, church teachers and pastors need to pay close attention to these issues. Our youth and children are particularly vulnerable to these dramatic changes in the public morality. Our young people who are growing up in this society will be able to withstand the onslaught of this larger cultural anarchy on sexual morality only if they believe that their allegiance to Christ requires that they do so.

And if they are not grounded in Christian truth and if they are not taught the principles of the Christian worldview, if they are not intelligent Christians who understand the discipleship of the mind, if they do not understand the comprehensive beauty of God's creation and what He has given us, if they do not understand that God's law is given to guide their steps so that they would be protected from harm and would flourish and to bring glory to God—then our youth will be swept away by the violent torrent of the contemporary godless culture and forever lost to us and to God.

If our youth are not deeply committed Christians grounded in the biblical truth once delivered to the saints and in the fullness of the gospel, they will not have the intellectual and moral resources to say, "I am committed to a higher wisdom because I have heard from the Creator, and He has a better plan for us than we have for ourselves."

When academia and media, or perhaps even our children, come to us and ask us about the existence of different sexual orientations and gender identities and if they argue that this is a fact of nature, what shall we tell them? The most proper answer is the answer Christ gave to the Jews who tempted Him with their question on divorce and remarriage: "But from the beginning it was not so" (Matthew 19:8).

Yes, we see so many things in our world that are not as they should be. However, this was not the way God intended this world and human family to be when He created everything perfect, as recorded in Genesis 1 and 2. We need to remember that

in the record of human beginnings we also find Genesis 3—the account of the human rebellion and fall into sin. The first sin proliferated so quickly that in the second generation a brother murdered a brother. Just a few generations thereafter human wickedness was so great that, except for eight righteous people, God had to destroy the entire human race by flood.

We need to tell everyone that what we see in our world today is simply the harvest of human rebellion against God. Christ told His disciples that immediately prior to His second coming, the condition of the human society would be just as it was in the days of Noah: "But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be." (Matthew 24:37). We also have to open those chapters in the Bible that we commonly do not use when delivering a sermon—like Leviticus 20, Romans 1:18–32, 1 Corinthians 6. These inspired texts were written for a reason—because someone was doing these things in the past and someone will practice them or be tempted to practice them in the future.

In these texts you may find a very graphic description of immoral acts of human beings. But these words are written for a reason. We need to be candid with our youth and children and instruct them wisely and tactfully in the whole counsel of God that is appropriate for their age.

We need to have conversations today with our children that our parents did not need to have with us. We need to have conversations in the church and around the dinner table, fathers with sons and mothers with daughters, conversations that were not needed before—but are now. Society has dramatically changed for the worse. But the Bible can provide the right answers. We must engage our youth in such conversations for the glory of God and for the integrity of the church and the future of the faith.

God has created everything with a perfect form and function and when sin had marred God's wonderful creation, God sent His Son to redeem humanity. God did it be-

cause He is love and He cares about His wayward children. God does not change, and His gospel does not change. Yes, God can save every one of His children even in this adulterous and sinful generation, everyone who comes to Him by faith and in repentance. This is the beauty and the power of the gospel—sinful and degenerate human beings can be completely forgiven and restored into the image of God, as the Creator intended it from the beginning.

"Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28). "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:25). *R*

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IMPEACH SIN!

As a medical doctor, I judge sickness from cause to effect. For obvious reasons, I am inclined to believe that in our world, regardless of the social, religious or political profile, we have the same pattern of reasoning as in the medical realm. The relationship between cause and effect passes the test of common sense in every dimension. It doesn't matter if you call this a cause-effect relationship or a choice-consequence relationship, in reality we are conveying the same message.

Sickness is and always will be an intruder to humanity. As physicians, we can choose to treat it with a quick fix, covering up of the symptoms—or we can treat it on the reasonable, honest and professionally ethical way, from the cause to effect. The latter option requires responsibility and cooperation on the part of the patient by giving up unhealthy behaviors such as smoking and/or drinking alcohol, replacing the “junk food” diet with a healthy one, starting a program of physical exercise, and exchanging negative thinking with positive thoughts. All these, combined with the proper treatment, will impeach the cause and the effect will disappear naturally. The wise man says, “As the bird by wandering, as the

swallow by flying, so the curse causeless shall not come” (Proverbs 26:2).

In my daily work with patients, I find joy in merging sound science with intelligent faith. So, from this perspective, I would like to share my personal view in regard to how our spiritually sick society can get rid of corruption, immorality, greed for power, and other such symptoms. How can we convince people from all social spectrums, beginning with the average worker up to the highest level of leadership, regardless of political and religious affiliation, to balance in their character, **trust, power, and responsibility?**

In the medical world we have an accurate process to define what normality is or is not. For instance, in cardiology I have learned that in order to define the term, we have to operate with precise and measurable data such as blood pressure and pulse rate.

If health and sickness are precisely defined by exact information and accurate standards, in the world of psychiatry the criteria are dramatically different—and that made me wonder how normality vs. abnormality are defined in this branch of medicine.

AN INTERESTING OBSERVATION

I was in the amphitheater of the psychiatry unit on a beautiful afternoon summer day. The professor was explaining what is considered normal by definition in the realm of this branch of medical science.

You take a control group to be subject to a specific battery of tests, and that will generate a personal reaction from each individual. For example, if the professor tells a joke and everybody laughs—yet one doesn't—that individual can be suspected of being “atypical” or not passing the test of normalcy.

If the professor tells a sad story and the majority typically react—while one is laughing—this last one can be suspected of being atypical.

But this way of defining what normalcy is or is not, is extremely relative, and in many respects, could be inaccurate or even dangerous. Why? Because there are people that respond in a different manner to the same circumstances without having any real problem of abnormality.

If in a control group, you share a mathematical problem to be solved, and the majority will choose the traditional pattern of solving it, while Albert Einstein would use a different

way of solving it, would we suspect Einstein of being abnormal or atypical?

Due to these elements, I decided to study and dig deeper into the issue of what normalcy is or is not. I was very impressed by a patient who was suffering from schizophrenia. I was quite surprised by the fact that this person was living a normal life without medication, just because he was reading the Bible daily.

THE SHIFT IN NORMALCY

As a matter of fact, there is a new science that has appeared in recent decades, called Epigenetics. This new science has demonstrated that the solution for our physical, mental and spiritual healing consists in the change of our environmental factors in order to stimulate the “resurrection” of our normalcy. On the other hand, the same science suggests that if we continue our so-called “normal” course of life and do nothing to help ourselves, we’ll deepen more and more in the illusion that we are “normal people” having a normal life, when in fact we become sicker and sicker every day. What is very ironic is the fact that we are the very ones deciding what type of genes will be activated—the good or the bad ones. We are the deciding factors; either we connect our minds to the source of Life, our God, or we connect our minds to the source of His enemy. The result will be the

inevitable consequences that can go as far as self-destruction.

In his book, *Pastoral Psychotherapy*, author Sorin Sandulache affirms that theologians are called upon to accept the fact that **sin** has produced such trauma that it affects the structure of the human soul and can cause it to be in need of psychological therapy and psychotherapy. As a result, even physiologists understand that often the cause of psychological suffering is not due only to a dysfunctional mechanism—but rather it may be deeply rooted and related to the reason of our existence and the purpose of our life on earth. The profound relationship through which humanity is connected with the image of God is reflected within ourselves, in connection with that part of us that relates to the worship and adoration of God.

Sadly, to notice that medical science and other “revolutionary” branches of medicine today have radically changed views in regard to what abnormality is. Comparing statements made by the same sources in the 1960s on the same topic, one will be amazed to see that what was a “no-no” for science at that time, today is “OK”; what was abnormal back then today is passing as a normal, typical behavior. Things that were unimaginable and unacceptable back then, today are part of the norm, being simply a matter of contemporary social conduct.

What pushed the world of “any kind of science” so drastically to the

other side? Can it be that the world of science may have failed the test of objectivity? Or perhaps science formed a world of its own? I am inclined to believe that science is very much affected by a new concept called “scientism,” an atheistic form of propaganda which indoctrinates the scientist with the concept of exclusivism. You cannot be a scientist and believe in creationism. Scientism has created an artificial incompatibility between science and the God of the Bible.

SCIENTISM VS. CREATIONISM

Let us take a look at how scientism is removing creationism from the face of the earth and from the mind of the individual by considering a sample of the ideas out there:

“We can be proud as a species because, having discovered that we are alone, we owe the gods very little,” boasts author E.O. Wilson.

“The more the universe seems comprehensible, the more it also seems pointless,” writer Stephen Weinburg asserts.

“The cosmos is all that is or ever was or ever will be,” claims astronomer Carl Sagan.

Society produces atypical behavior and sells it as normalcy; the normality becomes abnormal and the result is that whole society sinks in an ocean of relativism. The traditional family is out of fashion, pushed to the verge of abnormal, while the modern “new style” is heavily promoted as the norm.

This has prompted physicist Ian Hutchinson, to warn: “The health of science is in fact jeopardized by scientism, not promoted by it. At the very least, scientism provokes a defensive, immunological, aggressive response from other intellectual communities, in return for its own arrogance and intellectual bullying. It taints science itself by association.”

Albert Einstein commented: “A contemporary has said, not unjustly, that in this materialistic age of ours the serious scientific workers are the only profoundly religious people.”



EVIDENCE OF THE CULTURAL INNUENDOS

Here is an example of the cultural sea change in most of science: Books, dictionaries, and relevant magazines that define marriage according to the original design of God, are quietly removed from the public market as inciting abhorrent and horrible “anti-everything” declarations. Any person that would voice support for the Biblical marriage could be accused of “discrimination.” Some segments of society have gone so far as to consider illegal even portions of the Scriptures such as this: “Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four footed beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: who changed the truth of God into a lie and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: and likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet” (Romans 1:22–27).

The Bible—even Jesus—becomes illegal in our professedly Christian world. Christians are persecuted by their own children educated in the scientific socialite era. What a dark premonition for our future! Let us not lose courage; God will make His statement soon.

There was a time when words like “mother” or “father” were regarded with profound respect by the children. There was a time when bringing a glass of water to your parent was an honor and a privilege. Today all these values are disappearing. The commandment of God that says to respect your mother and your father is consid-

ered to be almost irrelevant. Today, we have modern socialism where parents should submit to their children. Parents teach their children to speak and children teach their parents to be quiet. The big current of evolutionism invites everybody in the “universal pot” of RELATIVISM, where SIN does not exist. The God of the Bible is replaced with “Mother Nature.” Since we have removed sin from the consciousness of the individual, there is no point in asking what morality is or how we can define an act as being immoral. Just as an example: In Chinese culture, abortion is a patriotic act, but for the Christian Bible believer, it is murder. Where is the standard of morality in this case? Some might say, “Well, that is relative; the truth is somewhere in between.”

WHY IS ALL THIS HAPPENING?

Over 100 years ago, the most translated American author of all times, said: “Wherever the divine precepts are rejected, sin ceases to appear sinful or righteousness desirable. Those who refuse to submit to the government of God are wholly unfitted to govern themselves. Through their pernicious teachings the spirit of insubordination is implanted in the hearts of children and youth, who are naturally impatient of control; and a lawless, licentious state of society results. While scoffing at the credulity of those who obey the requirements of God, the multitudes eagerly accept the delusions of Satan. They give the rein to lust and practice the sins which have called down judgments upon the heathen.”¹

“Already the doctrine that men are released from obedience to God’s requirements has weakened the force of moral obligation and opened the floodgates of iniquity upon the world. Lawlessness, dissipation, and corruption are sweeping in upon us like an overwhelming tide. In the family, Satan is at work. His banner waves, even in professedly Christian households. There is envy, evil surmising, hypocrisy, estrangement, emulation, strife, be-

trayal of sacred trusts, indulgence of lust. The whole system of religious principles and doctrines, which should form the foundation and framework of social life, seems to be a tottering mass, ready to fall to ruin. The vilest of criminals, when thrown into prison for their offenses, are often made the recipients of gifts and attentions as if they had attained an enviable distinction. **Great publicity is given to their character and crimes. The press publishes the revolting details of vice, thus initiating others into the practice of fraud, robbery, and murder;** and Satan exults in the success of his hellish schemes. The infatuation of vice, the wanton taking of life, the terrible increase of intemperance and iniquity of every order and degree, should arouse all who fear God, to inquire what can be done to stay the tide of evil.”²

If Nostradamus would have made such a statement that would surprise the world with its fulfillment, the world would be on its knees, praising him as a great prophet, but when a Christian author makes that remark, society rebuffs in ridicule and scourges against the message and the messenger. But we should consider impeaching SIN, which is biblically defined as transgression of the moral law of God (1 John 3:4) and then we’ll not be in a state of mind to demand various other dramatic forms of impeachment.

What is the very secret that makes a nation a bastion of freedom in the entire world? The timeless word of God explains: “Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people” (Proverbs 14:34).

Let’s give as an example a lesson from the founding fathers of the United States:

“The framers of the Constitution recognized the eternal principle that man’s relation with his God is above human legislation, and his rights of conscience inalienable. Reasoning was not necessary to establish this truth; we are conscious of it in our own bosoms. It is this consciousness which, in defiance of human laws, has sustained so many

martyrs in tortures and flames. They felt that their duty to God was superior to human enactments, and that man could exercise no authority over their consciences. It is an inborn principle which nothing can eradicate.'—Congressional documents (U.S.A.), serial No. 200, document No. 271."³

"In that grand old document which our forefathers set forth as their bill of rights—the Declaration of Independence—they declared: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.' And the Constitution guarantees, in the most explicit terms, the inviolability of conscience: 'No religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States.' 'Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.'"⁴

Let us keep in mind the old adage, that "like produces like." The society cited above produced great leaders like George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, and so many others. They were the products of a society that used the Bible, the word of God, as the supreme rule of moral conduct. Today, that nucleus may have evolved into an empire, but without those values promoted and believed in by the forefathers.

When a society produces leaders, in fact, they are the reflection of the character and morality of the people. Society should take upon itself the responsibility to impeach itself—not be the effect of its creation. Otherwise that would be a great paradox.

A BITTER LESSON FROM THE ROMAN EMPIRE

Rome was a small republic till it became an empire. Their government was made by the people for the people, till they became the absolute power of the world. The republican ideals were forgotten and instead of the SPQR (the senate

and the people of Rome), it became "The Caesar." The transfer of power from many to few resulted in an era of intolerance and bloodshed. Rome was admired for its art, sadly, without morality; Rome was loved for its beauty without truth; and finally Rome was feared for its glory without character. Are we in danger of building on the same shaky concept? Are the people of the leading nation of the free world—along with allied countries with similar values—truly and sincerely behaving and believing to be operating "under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all"? I hope that the time will never come when the most prominent nation on earth will exchange the principles of having religion without popes and society without kings for an Empire. Looking with the eyes of scrutiny to these three expressions: art without morality, beauty without truth, and glory without character, can we foresee the rise and the arrival of another "Caesar" under the garments and the power of Barabbas, leading not only one nation but the entire world? Some say that we as people never change and yet we are never the same.

Humanity loves with passion or hates with passion. If it is not convenient for the general interest, the same society will hate with the same passion the things they loved a few moments ago. Human love is usually circumstantial and very self-oriented, yet . . . history records a very special event that occurred in Palestine more than two thousand years ago!

A DIFFERENT KIND OF PICTURE

There was a man called Jesus. He was simple, very loving and compassionate. He was known as a man of truth and great valor. Children sensing Christ's nobility of character would often rush into His arms, sitting on His lap, admiring His smile.

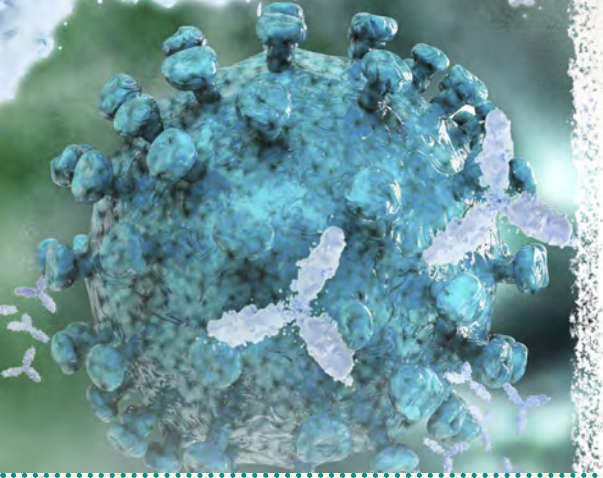
The adults listening to Him were astonished by His pure, harmless wisdom. The way He spoke, the way He walked, the way He fed the people, the way He forgave

and befriended sinners, the way He healed, made many of that generation to wonder if this Jesus might be that Promised One, the Messiah prophesied a long time before. Some were thinking that He would fit pretty well on the throne of Israel. After the great miracle of feeding five thousand people, the politicians in the person of the priests and the rabbis of that time were very much convinced that He was "THE ONE," at least as long as He would cooperate with their agenda.

They loved Jesus because they desired His powers to be under their control. They loved to see Jesus as their king, but only because they hated the Romans so much. As long as Jesus would banish the Romans out of Palestine, avenging the cruelty of Roman system, society would welcome Him.

The moment arrived. An excess of zeal made the multitudes to lay down their garments on the ground, shouting with a loud voice, "Hosanna, blessed is the One that comes in the name of the Lord." Jesus knew very well the character of their feelings and that He could never rely on their inconsistent and controversial sentiments. As the history would soon prove, their feelings of "love" were to change quickly, in just a few days, in fact. From the promising king of Israel, suddenly Jesus would be viewed as the national betrayer, especially since He was suspected of giving credit to a Roman centurion, acknowledging his great faith as being such that could not be seen even in Israel. (Matthew 8:10; Luke 7:9.) Showing a "dangerous sympathy" toward the Roman oppressors, determined the society of Jesus to irreversibly demand his "impeachment."

Jesus was abandoned for a **new hope**. They called it "Barabbas." Barabbas had proven his military ability by murdering a few Romans in a recent rebellion against the oppressing power. This Barabbas was evaluated by the "experts of the time" as being much more efficient in fulfilling their purpose. Barabbas was claiming to be the Messiah and his philosophy was to create a New World, using supernatural power.



Sin can be compared to the worst type of virus, destroying not only the body but destroying the image of God in our character.

In their view, Jesus the idealist, the “enemy lover,” must be eliminated.

The same people that were crying with a loud voice, “Hosanna, blessed is the one that comes in the name of the Lord” were the same people that were crying now, “Crucify Him, crucify Him,” or for a better understanding of the reader in our language today we’ll say: “Impeach Him, impeach Him.”

I am under the sincere impression that today, we the people, regardless of our church affiliation, regardless of our culture or even nationality, ignorantly repeat that same experience.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF JESUS?

Jesus came to impeach SIN. Society impeaches Jesus. The biblical definition of sin is the transgression of the moral law of God (1 John 3:4).

Jesus knew that sin can be compared to the worst type of virus, destroying not only the body but destroying the image of God in our character, and any trace of human elements would be perverted till humanity would self-exterminate.

Pontius Pilate stood before the people astonished by their coldness and cruelty. He himself was a cruel man, having sentenced many thieves and murderers in the process of crucifixion and death. But this time even he was disgusted by the level of their hatred. As an act of desperation, he asked the hysterical mob: “What shall I do with the king of the Jews?” The answer came like a storm of hell: “Crucify Him, crucify him,” “Do you want to crucify

your king?” they answered: “We have no king but Caesar!”

Pilate had known for a long time about their plan to overturn the Roman presence in Palestine by promoting Jesus as a king just to fulfil that purpose—and because Jesus did not comply with their scheme, now by rejecting Christ they were ready to embrace the very Caesar they hated so much. Here they were unmasked; their hypocrisy came to the surface. Based on what criteria did the mob request the impeachment of Jesus, and based on what reasoning did they decide to choose option number 2, Barabbas? The answer can be found in the Scripture: “The chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas, and destroy Jesus” (Matthew 27:20).

Was this choice based on intelligent reasoning or moral virtues? In choosing Barabbas they had chosen with their heart, not with their mind. Barabbas was the reflection of their inner character. Any time we choose a president, usually the society elects a leader that naturally will be the reflection of the character and values of that society. There will always be a few that will be found on the side of truth, and they will mark the presence of God in critical times and in the time of crisis, even though that will not always change the course of society nor the inevitable results.

IMPEACHMENT IN THE AIR

Hours, days, weeks, and months recently passed as the world was recently exposed to a public debate as to whether or not to impeach the

president of the United States. The same process occurred to another president less than 22 years ago. In the scope of American history, that’s really not a very long time.

Much time, energy, and money were consumed to prove the guilt or innocence of the respective leaders. As Christians, we have the duty to pray for our leaders regardless of what political flavor they may embrace. We have to pray for the accused and the accusers. And we do. The problem is that this type of action merely touches the tip of the iceberg, unveiling the unseen part of it. If society is really interested in bringing back the level of integrity of character and regain the lost values in our social backyard, then we must bring the Bible back on the table. A good society will naturally produce good leadership; a bad society will produce faulty leadership.

The Scripture says: “Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire” (Matthew 7:16–19).

May the Lord help us to impeach sin in our own lives and produce good fruit through the power and influence of Jesus, our Saviour! *R*

References:

- ¹ *The Great Controversy*, p. 584.
- ² *Ibid.*, p. 585. [Emphasis added.]
- ³ *Ibid.*, pp. 295, 296.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*



THE FLAVOR OF OUR FEAST

We're gathered around, enjoying a moment of relaxation following a satisfying fellowship meal. Everyone here is a believer, of course—we're all members of the same church. The weather outside is a little chilly, so it's more comfortable just to stay indoors, sitting for a while. After all, today is God's day of rest, so we figure we can take it easy. As mentioned, since it's God's day of rest, we also surely intend to keep the topic of conversation focused on church things, of course. So, the flow goes something like this:

Hmmm, church things. So, someone asks how Bro. Brown is doing over in the next state. Haven't seen him for a while. Oh, so he hasn't been coming to church. Hmmm, maybe he got annoyed at someone. Yeah, he always was a temperamental person. Surely he must be, since after all, he doesn't seem to look up to me as much as he should. He ought to realize that I know a lot and have a lot of experience. Doesn't he realize how knowledgeable I am? . . . And that wife of his, that's another story. She doesn't ask my wife for advice and she dresses in such a worldly way. And those children are pretty wild. But it's no wonder with

parents like that! And what about the Smith's? Those quiet people who probably think they're better than the rest of us. Yeah, I've seen people like that. I know what they're thinking. . . . And the story goes on. . . .

Then the conscience gives a little nudge, so someone says we need to talk about missionary work. So, the conversation moves on to how we need to go out into all the world and preach the gospel. And we get to talking about how the church isn't doing this as it should be. Nobody seems to discern this like we do, that's for sure. Why not? Well, that pastor of ours is so lazy and the missionary leader always seems to be on vacation. No wonder we don't have much outreach going on! How he can afford to spend money like that on all those fancy vacations is anybody's guess. And the complaints go on. . . .

Time flies, and since it's wintertime, the day is short, so sunset comes before we even realize it. Time to close God's holy day. Already, hmmm, amazing! Well, we're pleased because we talked so much about the "Gospel" that it feels like we actually did something about it.

(But was that G-O-S-P-E-L or G-O-S-S-I-P?)

Is there something wrong with this picture?

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A CHURCH AND A CLUB?

Regrettably, the type of scenario depicted above might end up occurring in a church of any denomination. Although those seated were religious people, the conversation ended up drifting off to be not about the religion itself—which was supposedly their common ground—but rather about various people within their religious group. Technically, these people were part of their circle of friends. Those not present probably trusted the ones speaking and would likely have been surprised and hurt to hear what was being said about them by their friends.

But was this group sitting around really behaving like members of a church?

The word "church" comes from the Greek word *ecclesia*, meaning a "calling out," an assembly that has been separated for a specific purpose, set apart to be pure in

the sight of a holy God. The word was originally used in reference to the followers of Jesus Christ as a body—depicted as a loving, charitable body in Ephesians 5:23–27. Why is it loving? Because it is founded on the life and teachings of Jesus. The principles and faith of Christ are the motive power of the body, composed of “such as should be saved” for eternity (Acts 2:47). A club, on the other hand, typically is a group composed of people who have something in common that connects them—yet without the eternal aim of sanctification through the Holy Spirit.

BUT WHAT HAPPENS IF WE FEEL DISAPPOINTED BY DEFECTS IN THE CHURCH?

The Lord gives instruction on how to handle difficulties within His body, the body of Christ:

“If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and publican” (Matthew 18:15–17). So, if someone behaves in a way that you think is offensive:

Talk to him/her about it privately.

If the person refuses to heed, ask one or two others to come along when you try again—but don’t prejudice them in advance! It’s only fair to let the one you are visiting get a chance to be heard without bias.

If the person still refuses to heed, only then should the matter be taken to the governance of the church, which might choose to exercise its authority to place the person on church discipline—and eventually disfellowshipment if necessary. But even if the case would come to such a point, the person would then become as a heathen man and a publican. (By the way, how are we supposed to treat the heathen man and publi-

can? We should be eager to win them to Christ, of course!)

Such a plan illustrates the love of Jesus for the precious souls for whom He died. We can only have this love if we realize the inestimable value of a soul—and nurture respect and care in our heart for fellow human beings made in the image of the same Creator as our own.

DISRESPECTFUL DIOTREPHESES

When we erring mortals approach a holy, just, and righteous God, it is not all that extraordinary for us to bow readily into submission, since we know we’re not perfect and He is. And we also know that we are not to bow down to mortals as if they were God—that would be sacrilegious. But what is to characterize our relationship to them?

The apostle Paul warns concerning a problem attitude:

“I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, **who loveth to have the preeminence** among them, receiveth us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, **prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith**, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church. Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God” (3 John 9–11).

Diotrephes considered it his right to look down on others as a way of exalting himself. Yes, he was in the church, he was “among them,” but what was the problem? He loved to have the preeminence; he enjoyed being the focus of attention. As a result, when anyone might seem to be a potential threat to his status, he prated against them with malicious words. To “prate” is to chatter or speak foolishly or idly—and the words that came from Diotrephes were also spiked with malice—typically a bitter fruit of jealousy.

CHARITABLE COURTESY—OR CANNIBALISM?

“Let every one attend to his own work, and not regard himself as



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appointed by the Lord to watch for something to criticize in the work that his brother does. If a worker sees that a fellow laborer is in danger of doing wrong, let him go to him, and point out his danger, listening kindly and patiently to any explanation that may be offered. He dishonors the Saviour when, instead of doing this, he tells others of the mistakes that he thinks his fellow worker is making.

“My brother, my sister, you are forbidden to make the mistakes of a fellow worker the subject of conversation. By speaking evil of another, you sow the seeds of criticism and denunciation. You can not afford to do this. Go to the one who you think is in the wrong, and tell him his fault ‘between thee and him alone.’ If he will hear you, and can explain the matter to you, how glad you will be that you did not take up a reproach against him, but followed instead the Saviour’s directions.

“Let us refuse to bear evil reports concerning our fellow laborers. The reputation of men and women is held of high value by him who gave his life to save souls. He has told us how those in fault should be dealt with. No one is sufficiently wise to improve on God’s plan.

“Parents should teach their children to speak ill of no man. Insinuations, words that hurt the reputation of one who is doing the Lord’s work, grieve and dishonor the Saviour. And God’s Word de-

clares, ‘By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.’ To those who have educated themselves to speak unadvisedly, I am instructed to say, Unless you cease encouraging evil-speaking, unless you guard as Christians should the reputation of your fellow workers, you will endanger your own soul and the souls of many others. No longer talk about the wrong that someone is doing. Never, never repeat a scandal. Go to the one assailed, and ask him in regard to the matter. God has not appointed any man to be the judge of another man’s motives and work. He who feels at liberty to dissect the character of another, he who intentionally detracts from the influence of a fellow worker, is as verily breaking God’s law as if he openly disregarded the Sabbath of the fourth commandment.”¹

“We think with horror of the cannibal who feasts on the still warm and trembling flesh of his victim; but are the results of even this practice more terrible than are the agony and ruin caused by misrepresenting motive, blackening reputation, dissecting character?”²

When asked about the wounds in His hands in the earth made new, Jesus will explain that He was wounded in the house of His friends (Zechariah 13:6). We might be inclined to assume that such wounding might be expected in view of the great controversy existing on our

fallen planet, so maybe we shouldn’t be surprised. But, in clearer reality—in the sight of God—woe to such friends! Such is the type of “house” that Christ identified not as His Father’s (John 2:16), but rather was one of which He said, “**your** house is left unto you **desolate**” (Matthew 23:38). And He walked away, never to return—in a similar verdict as when He spews the lukewarm out of His mouth in our era (Revelation 3:16).

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

So, in the scene at the beginning of this article, were the people who had just eaten indulging in cannibalism for dessert?

What should have been done about the Brown family? And the Smith family? Did anyone think to give them a telephone call or visit, praying with them, trying to understand their life and perspective? Or would it be easier just to try to let their situation run its course until they would just eventually leave so we could be rid of them?

“Preaching is a small part of the work to be done for the salvation of souls. God’s Spirit convicts sinners of the truth, and He places them in the arms of the church. The ministers may do their part, but they can never perform the work that the church should do. God requires His church to nurse those who are young in faith and experience, to go to them, not for the purpose of



“Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others” (Philippians 2:3, 4).

gossiping with them, but to pray, to speak unto them words that are 'like apples of gold in pictures of silver.'"³

The wise talk about ideas, the foolish talk about people. Was that meal and conversation spiritual "health reform"? Hardly. "Death and life are in the power of the tongue" (Proverbs 18:21).

"In Scripture, backbiters are classed with 'haters of God,' with 'inventors of evil things,' with those who are 'without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful,' 'full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity.' It is 'the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death' (Romans 1:30, 31, 29, 32)."⁴

In contrast, Psalm 15 outlines the prerequisites involved citizenship in Heaven—he that "speaketh the truth in his heart;" "that backbiteth not with his tongue," "nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbor" (Psalm 15:2, 3).

Many a professed Christian has fun being witty—but too often the style of wit could grieve the Spirit of God. We are well familiar with the command: "Grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption" (Ephesians 4:30), but we may not notice the verse just before it and the one just after it: "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. . . .

Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice" (Verse 29, 31).

Just as the flavor of our food is based upon the ingredients that compose it, so the flavor of our words is based upon what's in our heart. That means even our motives and intentions must be pure from the inside out, even living as we do on a planet corrupted by sin—tainted by the legacy of Lucifer.

LUCIFER VS. CHRIST

Before the creation of the earth, the covering cherub, Lucifer, had malicious intentions even against



his own Creator, as he inwardly plotted: "I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High" (Isaiah 14:13, 14).

Higher and higher was his ambition—not to be like God in character, but rather in preeminence. How do we know this? He did not cultivate the character of God as manifested in Christ, who humbled Himself in service to the world. Instead, he always tried to belittle Jesus and has continued that fiendish course on our planet.

WHAT IS THE SOLUTION FOR US?

"A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh" (Luke 6:45).

"Bring Christ into all your associations; then the dark, sinful soul will have chapters of the love of Jesus open to its contemplation. When you partake of Christ, His goodness, His way, become yours, His will subdues your will."⁵

We, in contrast to Lucifer, are bidden to become the way Jesus is:

"Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other bet-

ter than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:3–8).

Considering others better than ourselves. . . . What a rare quality! Yet this is the culture of Heaven. Without it we would never be at home there or pleasing to God on earth. God the Father says to the Son, "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom" (Hebrews 1:8) and, in turn, self-sacrifice is the keynote of Christ's example and His teaching as well. This attitude is to be ours.

So, as we're learning to live and speak the language of Heaven, our thoughts and words take on a new flavor, a refreshing savor of life unto life. May this be our experience!

"Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man" (Colossians 4:6). *R*

References:

¹ *Review and Herald*, May 12, 1903.

² *Education*, p. 235.

³ *Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 69.

⁴ *Education*, pp. 235, 236.

⁵ *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 16, p. 312.



ICHABOD, ICHABOD, ICHABOD

THE PRIDE OF THE NATION

With hearts thrilled with joy and admiration, the disciples were gazing at the beautiful buildings of the temple. “The rays of the setting sun lighted up the snowy whiteness of its marble walls and gleamed from golden gate and tower and pinnacle. ‘The perfection of beauty’ it stood, the pride of the Jewish nation.”¹ Yes, the buildings! Such wonderful walls! The Jewish nation had been investing in those walls—even Herod the Great and Caesar had contributed to adorning and perfecting the buildings of the temple, and it had become the nation’s pride.

The disciples noticed that Jesus was not touched by similar admiration. Why was Jesus, usually so sensitive to details, now so indifferent? Was it that He did not see the landscape?

“One of his disciples saith unto him, Master, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here!” (Mark 13:1.) Yes, He was looking! He was clearly seeing not only those beautiful buildings; but their terrible emptiness! Yes, they were the pride of the nation! Those empty, marble, snow-white walls,

were the reason of their pride. The Jewish nation was not concerned about the infinite sadness of not having Jehovah within those buildings! And Jesus, the Great Jehovah, was seeing, for the last time, that fundamental lack. He came to the beloved city again and again, “with salvation under His wings,” He came through His prophets, and was rejected. At last, He, the Majesty of Heaven, came in person “to His own, and his own received him not” (John 1:11). “What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it?” (Isaiah 5:4). With a broken heart, “when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it” (Luke 19:41).

A TRAGIC END

With prophetic eye, Christ was contemplating those very palaces and their expensive towers and pinnacles, being consumed by the huge flames of the destruction! The beautiful walls of the temple, in which for so many centuries His presence had been implored—those walls covered with gold—were seen taken by fire. The children now waving palm tree leaves for Him, He

saw in the future—cursed by fear, hungered by the famine, unable to give a piece of bread to their own children when the Romans were to take the holy city. And His heart-breaking sorrow was that His help was denied! He could have saved the city! He could have spared the temple, with all its worshipers, both old and young, had they accepted Him as their Redeemer! The last hours of their long-rejected period of grace were still favorable to the salvation of themselves and their city! How different would have been the history of their nation, had they accepted the tender invitation of Messiah! But they were not ready to accept Him. In spite of all the centuries-long calls and invitations of His grace, through His prophets, the proud nation of His children was denying Him, their Only Hope! With tears of terrible anguish, the Lord wept over the proud, unrepentant city: “If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every

side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation" (Luke 19:42-44).

THEN WHAT?

Fearful was the literal fulfillment of these prophecies! The proud, self-sufficient people of Judah had rejected the implorations of its loving Father. The calls to repentance, to changes of life and deportment to harmonize with the law of liberty were boastfully rejected, and the prophets, faithfully advocating the graces of repentances and the punishments for rebellion, were one after another persecuted to death. Under a terrible deception, the chosen people of God were filling up the cup of their iniquities! And the Spirit of God, so long despised and rejected was eventually to be withdrawn. They had so long played with His grace, but, in their terrible deception they were still believing that the presence of God would continue to accompany and protect them. Micah the prophet was sizing up their fearful situation, "Hear this, I pray you, ye heads of the house of Jacob, and princes of the house of Israel, that abhor judgment, and pervert all equity. They build up Zion with blood, and Jerusalem with iniquity. The heads thereof judge for reward, and the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money: yet will they lean upon the Lord, and say, Is not the Lord among us? none evil can come upon us" (Micah 3:9-11). The reality instead, was to be totally different: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, **your house is left unto you desolate**" (Matthew 23:37, 38). [Emphasis added.]

The satanic majesty, which they were insistently tolerating in their minds, was taking the full control over the chosen nation. "Then God

In all human experience a theoretical knowledge of the truth has been proved to be insufficient for the saving of the soul. . . . A jealous regard for what is termed theological truth often accompanies a hatred of genuine truth as made manifest in life.

withdrew His protection from them and removed His restraining power from Satan and his angels, and the nation was left to the control of the leader she had chosen. Her children had spurned the grace of Christ, which would have enabled them to subdue their evil impulses, and now these became the conquerors. Satan aroused the fiercest and most debased passions of the soul. Men did not reason; they were beyond reason—controlled by impulse and blind rage. They became satanic in their cruelty. In the family and in the nation, among the highest and the lowest classes alike, there was suspicion, envy, hatred, strife, rebellion, murder. There was no safety anywhere. Friends and kindred betrayed one another. Parents slew their children, and children their parents. . . . Satan was at the head of the nation."²

The edifice called Israel was falling apart, as they rejected the "cornerstone," the Holy One of Israel. For four decades, the curse they pronounced upon themselves was graciously postponed. But the dark night was approaching. . . . The Roman general Titus resumed the siege of the Romans against Jerusalem and the whole nightmare of what it means to be **without God and His grace** was largely displayed. It was in the time of Passover, and the millions of Israel were crowding the city.

"All the horrors of starvation were experienced. A measure of wheat was sold for a talent. So fierce were the pangs of hunger that men would gnaw the leather of their belts and sandals and the covering of their shields. Great numbers of the people would steal out at night to gather wild plants growing outside the city walls, though many

were seized and put to death with cruel torture, and often those who returned in safety were robbed of what they had gleaned at so great peril. The most inhuman tortures were inflicted by those in power, to force from the want-stricken people the last scanty supplies which they might have concealed."³ Oh, the blessed city, on whose streets the voice of their divine Father had been heard for centuries, in calls of mercy, was now devoured by the curse of their rebellion.

"Those prisoners who resisted when taken, were scourged, tortured, and crucified before the wall of the city. Hundreds were daily put to death in this manner, and the dreadful work continued until, along the Valley of Jehoshaphat and at Calvary, crosses were erected in so great numbers that there was scarcely room to move among them."⁴ Woeful was the fulfillment of the doom they sentenced upon themselves, when they had put their Saviour to death! (Matthew 27:25.)

Eventually the city was attacked as by a storm. Titus clearly directed his commanders to spare the temple, if possible. But his commands were disregarded. As the Jews attacked the Roman soldiers at night, in the battle a Roman soldier flung a firebrand "through an opening in the porch, and immediately the cedar-lined chambers about the holy house were in a blaze. Titus rushed to the place, followed by his generals and legionaries, and commanded the soldiers to quench the flames. His words were unheeded. In their fury the soldiers hurled blazing brands into the chambers adjoining the temple, and then with their swords they slaughtered in great numbers those who had found shelter there. Blood flowed down the

temple steps like water. Thousands upon thousands of Jews perished. Above the sound of battle, voices were heard shouting: 'Ichabod!' — the glory is departed."⁵

Ichabod! Ichabod! . . . Too late were they discovering that their righteousness was but "filthy rags" and their merits of being children of Abraham, a chosen nation, were not sufficient to bring salvation! Too late did they realize that merely assuming that God is with them does not mean the same thing as being assured of His protective presence! Too late did they see that carefully sticking to their traditions and ceremonies while indulging all sorts of sins, abuses and transgressions did not ensure deliverance! Crushed by fear and despair, the Jews were witnessing the fall of Jehovah's beloved capital, they themselves being slaughtered by the sword of the conqueror!

Ichabod! The glory is gone! What a terrible experience for such a privileged people!

WHY?

A necessary question arises, though: What had gone wrong in their theology, in their religion? How could they have managed to bring upon themselves so great a disaster, while having such a merciful God? The pen of Inspiration explains: "The greatest deception of the human mind in Christ's day was that a mere assent to the truth constitutes righteousness. In all human experience a theoretical knowledge of the truth has been proved to be insufficient for the saving of the soul. It does not bring forth the fruits of righteousness. A jealous regard for what is termed **theological truth** often accompanies a hatred of **genuine truth** as made manifest in life."⁶ They were proud of being the children of Abraham. But by rejecting Abraham's fountain of holy living — complete dependence on God by faith — in reality, they were not His children! They were trusting in their rules and ceremonies as having saving merit. In the same way they were looking to the temple as recommending them to the Lord's

favor, although His word was clear: "Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, are these. For if ye thoroughly amend your ways and your doings; if ye thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbour; If ye oppress not the stranger, . . . Then will I cause you to dwell in this place" (Jeremiah 7:4-7).

The glory of their eternal Creator had been graciously offered to them! That temple with so inferior a structure to that of Solomon's first temple had been promised to enjoy greater glory than Solomon's. And the promise was graciously fulfilled. The whole heaven was comprised in One Gift; the glory of the Father, His perfect character shone forth in His Beloved Son! For three and a half years He walked, preached, and brought the heaven's blessings. They rejected Him and His glory, exchanging it for the vain glory that men give one another! They were proud of the symbols of God's glory, denying at the same time the Glorious One! All those symbols and ceremonies had been carefully established to point to the Messiah, the Redeemer — the core and the fulfillment of them all — had been wrongly regarded as a Saviour themselves! Thus they were laying the foundation for the later rejection of Christ.⁷ "They failed to discern the veiled mystery of godliness; Christ Jesus remained veiled to them. The truth, the life, the heart of all their service, was discarded. They held, and still hold, the mere husks, the shadows, the figures."⁸ They were boasting with the beauty of the temple's buildings, out of which, by rejecting Christ, they were making "a den of thieves" (Luke 19:46).

Even after they had cruelly crucified the Son of God, the Father's tender heart had insisted on seeking to save them! For another 3½ years, the apostles went on to proclaim salvation through Christ's blood, calling the nation to repentance. And then, even after they sealed their rejection as a nation by the blood of Stephen, the Lord graciously postponed the penalty of their crimes, giving their

cursed children a chance to decide for themselves. . . . And they chose! They chose for their house to remain "desolate," deprived of the glory they were rejecting, exactly in the same way their fathers did when they crucified Christ! And now, terrified by the desolation, they were crying over the huge fire flames devouring the holy walls of the temple: **Ichabod, the glory has departed!**

What about you and me, today? "From eternal ages it was God's purpose that every created being, from the bright and holy seraph to man, should be a temple for the indwelling of the Creator."⁹ Are we a temple for the habitation of the Holy One? (1 Corinthians 3:16.) Or is it only a pretense as we unconsciously repeat the history of the Jewish people? Are we resisting Him in the same way they did? Are we, through our thoughts and actions, putting Him to death as well? Do we experience the same opposition of the inner heart, feeling that "We will not have this man to rule over us"?¹⁰

"The same danger [the deception that destruction to the Jewish nation] still exists. Many take it for granted that they are Christians, simply because they subscribe to certain theological tenets. But they have not brought the truth into practical life. They have not believed and loved it, therefore they have not received the power and grace that come through sanctification of the truth. Men may profess faith in the truth; but if it does not make them sincere, kind, patient, forbearing, heavenly-minded, it is a curse to its possessors, and through their influence it is a curse to the world."¹¹

Do we have Christ, or are we choosing to be "left desolate," a curse for ourselves and through our influence "a curse to the world"? Are we the church of God shining forth the glories of His character? "The Jewish people cherished the idea that they were the favorites of heaven, and that **they were always to be exalted as the church of God.**"¹² But they failed to bring God into their life, as the only fountain of righteousness. "They rejected the



Might we be busy looking in the wrong direction and miss out on preparing for the Desire of all Nations?

Light of the world, and thenceforth their lives were surrounded with darkness as the darkness of midnight."¹³ Ichabod!

WHAT ABOUT US?

Do we have the truth, or have we only subscribed to cold, empty, unable-to-save theory of the truth? The truth is not a theory; it is a Person! "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6), He says! "He that hath the Son hath life" (1 John 5:12). And if we have Him, the fountain of Life, then we bring forth His fruits! "On this earth, the earth whose soil has been moistened by the tears and blood of the Son of God, are to be brought forth the precious fruits of Paradise. In the lives of God's people the truths of His word are to reveal their glory and excellence. Through His people Christ is to manifest His character and the principles of His kingdom."¹⁴

"Christ's prediction regarding the destruction of the temple was a lesson on the purification of religion, by making of none effect forms and ceremonies. He announced Himself greater than the temple, and stood forth proclaiming, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life.' He was the one in whom all the Jewish ceremony and typical service was to find its fulfillment. He stood

forth in the place of the temple; all the offices of the church centered in Himself alone."¹⁵ Then do the ceremonies and the rites have any meaning today, or should we leave them aside altogether? By themselves, they don't have absolutely any power to help or change the sinner's life. We cannot trust them at all for having any saving attributes, as the Jews were mistakenly believing. But in connection with Christ, pointing to Him and bringing Him to the sinner as the only Hope, they have their positive role:

"The righteousness which Christ taught is conformity of heart and life to the revealed will of God. Sinful men can become righteous only as they **have faith in God and maintain a vital connection with Him**. Then true godliness will elevate the thoughts and ennoble the life. Then the external forms of religion accord with the Christian's internal purity. Then the ceremonies required in the service of God are not meaningless rites, like those of the hypocritical Pharisees."¹⁶

May this be our experience! Understanding our complete impotence to do any good, and our total dependence on Him for any righteousness, let us cast ourselves into His arms! Let us claim His merits and His grace to become ours, by faith in Him! Today is the day of our visita-

tion! Today the dear Lord Jesus may tell His and our Father: "And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them" (John 17:22). Today we may make sure our call and our election! And then, if the Lord grant us any tomorrow, "we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Corinthians 3:18). May God make us a tree fruitful for His glory, full of the fruits of the Spirit! May He make us "a savor of life unto life" for all those around us! May He help us see Him—the First and the Last—in all our services, ceremonies and Christian duties! And, as He daily gives us the grace to become more like Him, may He grant us the privilege to be taken one day to the New Jerusalem, He Himself being its TEMPLE! Amen! *R*

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¹ *The Great Controversy*, pp. 17, 18.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 28, 29.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

⁶ *The Desire of Ages*, p. 309. [Emphasis added.]

⁷ See *The Great Controversy*, p. 24.

⁸ *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 398.

⁹ *The Desire of Ages*, p. 161.

¹⁰ *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 293.

¹¹ *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 309, 310.

¹² *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 294. [Emphasis added.]

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 295.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 296.

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BY Davi Paes Silva and Liviu Tudoroiu

JESUS AND HUMAN TRADITION



“And he shall speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and **think to change times and laws**: and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time” (Daniel 7:25). [Emphasis added.]

Evidently, there are good traditions and human traditions. The traditions that are in harmony with the Word of God will always impact the poor and the needy in a positive way. Traditions that come from the Word of God will not promote laws that will be antisocial in nature, and will neither endorse extortion nor abuse of power. The **traditions that are evil in nature usually contradict God’s law, contest His authority as the Creator of the universe, and ultimately incriminate His character.**

Human tradition has a powerful mixture of political and religious flavor—and due to this fact, tradition may claim the responsibility of defining what the national identity of so many cultures actually is. Its influence plays a definite role in what the moral compass is or is not in the society of nations.

For obvious reasons, we are inclined to respect human traditions, as they supposedly came from God. Oftentimes we enforce them as if they would have an equal authority with biblical doctrines.

“It is very surprising how small an amount of Scripture proof will suffice to convince a person of something he wants to believe; and what a large amount is required to convince him of a plain truth which he does not relish.”¹

It is easy for human nature to think to create another way to heaven. The apostle Paul, one of the most brilliant converted minds of the New Testament, acknowledged that as long as he followed the national tradition, he felt no need of adjusting his “perfection” to match that tradition. But when he met Christ, he realized that his entire effort to meet the satisfaction of the law was incomplete.

WHAT DOES NATIONAL TRADITION OFTEN DO?

It’s easier to hate your enemies and harder to love them. In the time of Jesus, national tradition fed on hatred against Roman authority to such a degree that anyone who might show sympathy towards the Romans or act on the side of mercy, could be socially ostracized. For any kind act or compassion towards the Romans one would be labeled as a national betrayer.

Oftentimes, hatred was justified and legitimized from the pulpit of the synagogues under a traditional and religious umbrella. Christ

would recommend prayer for the persecuting power, while **tradition would recommend death to the persecutors.** Analyzing the facts, we ask ourselves, does the tradition originate from religion or politics? Or is it maybe a blend of both? Unquestionably, **the way of tradition is easy; it is the way of popular current,** because it’s natural and human, but walking in the light of Christ is like walking against the current; it’s like walking against yourself, stepping on your own heart. That is why so many—often the majority—prefer to choose the easy way, the way of tradition.

The way of tradition does not call for self-denial and the death of pride. Jesus rejected this dangerous hybrid with repulsion: “For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. But **all their works they do for to be seen of men**: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, and love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and **the chief seats in the synagogues,** and greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi. But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven.

Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ. But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted" (Matthew 23:4-12). [Emphasis added.]

Jesus could have had a very easy life by compromising and accepting the national tradition, but He knew very well the price of such compromise and the end of it. Humanity's eternal separation from the immaculate universe and the permanent presence of sin—these were the things that Jesus abhorred.

The risk was incommensurable. "Had the head of Christ been touched, the hope of the human race would have perished. Divine wrath would have come upon Christ as it came upon Adam. Christ and the church would have been without hope."² Instead, Jesus came from above to share with humanity the will of His Father, which is the condition of entering the kingdom of God, and is contrary to the will of man, often entitled: TRADITION.

"Love your enemies" was the great crime Jesus committed against Jewish tradition. "Love your enemies" was a great crime against Roman tradition, and "Love your enemies" is a great crime against Islamic tradition as well. Loving His enemies brought Christ to the point of crucifixion. The Jews accused Jesus for violating tradition by loving the Romans, by being the Friend of sinners, by eating with the publicans, by visiting their homes, and ultimately, by healing people on the Sabbath day. Such "crimes" were perfectly in accordance with the word of God, but not in accordance with their tradition.

These actions expelled Jesus from the synagogue and from Jewish society. While Jewish tradition will impeach Jesus for being of too great honesty, being of too great sincerity, being the type of a leader that cannot be bribed to accept the demand of national corruption, the same society would join forces with the Romans to remove Jesus from their personal interest. The Romans and the Jewish leaders suddenly became

friends and fictitiously invented the final verdict to condemn the Saviour: "Treason against the Roman government was the crime for which Jesus was condemned."³ Jewish tradition put Jesus on the cross for being the Son of God, under the words: "We have no other king but Caesar," while the Romans crucified Him for being the king of the Jews. Every time the great *Ecce Homo*, "Behold the Man," has been manifested in the character of His followers, **history has repeated itself in the same manner of impeaching Christ.** A corrupted society cannot stand the perfection and purity of Christ's character. That is why to give unrepentant sinners the opportunity to dwell in the very presence of God would be torture to them. The presence of Christ in the person of His followers was the hardest rebuke that could be given to a corrupt religious system, designed to awaken the conscience of the individual.

From the time Christ was a child, He was confronted by the wrath of tradition—first in the family, second in the synagogue, third in the Jewish society, and at the end, He was confronted by the "iron" of the Roman Empire. In the book *The Desire of Ages*, under the chapter "Days of Conflict" the author emphasizes the conflict between Jesus and the partisans of human tradition as follows:

"From its earliest years the Jewish child was surrounded with the requirements of the rabbis. Rigid rules were prescribed for every act, down to the smallest details of life. Under the synagogue teachers the youth were instructed in the countless regulations which as orthodox Israelites they were expected to observe. But Jesus did not interest Himself in these matters. **From childhood He acted independently of the rabbinical laws.** The Scriptures of the Old Testament were His constant study, and the words 'Thus saith the Lord,' were ever upon His lips.

"As the condition of the people began to open to His mind, **He saw that the requirements of society and the requirements of God were in constant collision. Men were departing from the word of God, and exalting theories of their own**

invention. They were observing traditional rites that possessed no virtue."⁴

Because of the great influence the rabbis had upon the people, Mary, the mother of Jesus, and His brothers tried to convince Jesus to consider with solemnity the traditions of the rabbis. But His firmness was unshaken. In condemning the traditions that were designed to eliminate the responsibility of respecting the mother and the father with the magic word "Corban," Jesus really "stepped on the toes" of the Pharisees. "Then the Pharisees and scribes asked him, Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands? He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. Howbeit **in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men,** as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do. And he said unto them, Full well ye **reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition.**" (Mark 7:5-9). [Emphasis added.]

"[The rabbis] **knew that no authority could be found in Scripture for their traditions.** They realized that in spiritual understanding Jesus was far in advance of them. **Yet they were angry because He did not obey their dictates.**"⁵

THE POSITION OF CHRIST AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Christ kept His independence from these human injunctions, while wholeheartedly keeping Himself dependent upon His Father's will. His life was made very difficult because of their constant pressure to coerce Him to comply with their human traditions, being hunted and misrepresented in most of His public declarations.

After Jesus had begun His ministry, the Jewish rabbis carried out even more severe **surveillance** upon

Him to find a motive to accuse Him for ignoring their traditions. Their phobia was based on the fear of losing their influence upon the people. The fact that Jesus would attract thirsty sinners to the Word of God, showing the inutility of their senseless human traditions, provoked a frenzy among the Pharisees that bordered on insanity.

They could not endure the fact that their fabricated traditions would be ignored. These traditions were their main tools in maintaining their control upon the conscience of people. But the very thing they feared soon became reality. Jesus spoke as no other man had ever spoken. The Bread of life, the Water of life, the Light of the world, the Rock of Ages, and the Good Shepherd was living among the people. He never had a home, never had an army, never traveled more than 300 miles from the place of His birth, yet Jesus changed the entire human destiny. No government, no army, no genius could ever carry out the changes Jesus did in the society of nations.

The accusation against Jesus that He violated the Sabbath does not stand the test of the Bible.

Yes, Jesus may have **abolished the traditions of man**, those senseless injunctions in the protocol of keeping the Sabbath, but in no case did Jesus nullify the creation of His own work, “the Sabbath of the Lord” (not the sabbath of the Jews).

O Heaven and earth, marvel to **see the creature persecuting the Creator!** The hypocrisy of the Pharisees went so far as to secretly conspire against the Redeemer and plan to kill the Lamb of God. What a scene for the universe! Just because “The Author of the Sabbath,” the Creator of the planet, in a literal seven-day week did not comply with their man-made traditions, the leaders of His time were determined to overrule Christ, or, if that was not possible, ultimately to destroy Him. “The **chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude** that they should ask Barabbas, and **destroy Jesus**” (Matthew 27:20). [Emphasis added.]

Human tradition suffocated all practical religion, and the mean-

ing of the Sabbath was perceived as merely a day of torture. How deep is the blindness of someone to worship the Sabbath, but not the Creator of the Sabbath? It was like in the time of old when the Israelites worshipped the ark of covenant while violating commandments that were in the ark. “When they looked upon the ark, and did not associate it with God, nor honor His revealed will by obedience to His law, it could avail them little more than a common box. They **looked to the ark as the idolatrous nations looked to their gods, as if it possessed in itself the elements of power and salvation.** They transgressed the law it contained; **for their very worship of the ark led to formalism, hypocrisy, and idolatry.**”⁶ The same thing was repeated in the next generations of Hebrews. They worshipped the “Sabbath” instead of worshipping **the Lord** of the Sabbath, and that inevitably led the nation to the same results: formalism, hypocrisy and idolatry.

CHRIST AND THE SABBATH

Jesus was mingling with the people on the Sabbath. This day of rest, the Sabbath, far away from worldly burdens, just you and Jesus—what an amazing design! Jesus, the special guest in my house on the Sabbath day! While the seventh-day Sabbath was regarded as one of the most sacred religious activities of the nation, the priests and the rulers were hiding their true plans under a “pious religious garment” on the very Sabbath day, hunting for Christ as if for a criminal. As long as He was alive, as long as He offered people comfort, love, and guidance, the Pharisees had no peace. They had to try to destroy Him by miserable and infamous character assassination and false accusations.

If Jesus were indeed guilty of violating the Sabbath day (as they accused Him), and consequently became a casual sinner, Jesus would have failed to qualify to become the Saviour of the world. Such derogation would eternally separate Him from His Father. To accuse Jesus of breaking the fourth commandment of God and at the same time

recognize Him as the Saviour of the world, may set the stage for one of the most notorious theological inconsistencies in the Christian world. The very essence of the plan of salvation was based on proving that the law of God can indeed be respected by man, and by demonstrating this fact, the character of God would be vindicated before the entire universe, legitimizing the process of adoption for the human race and re-titling the repentant sinners with new names such as “sons and daughters” of God. The purpose of the daily hardships and temptations in the life of Jesus would convince the sincere Bible reader that the law of God was at stake. One single commandment violated by the hand, foot, eye, thought or conscience, would cause Jesus to forfeit the right to save humanity. But praised be the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, because His life was the best argument speaking in favor of our Heavenly Father, His character, and in support of our salvation.

THE EARLY CHURCH

Since Christianity claims to uphold values that originate in the Scripture, and since Christian society today chooses the day of the sun, or Sunday as we all call it, to replace the biblical seventh-day Sabbath, an exigent historical inquiry may be demanded for clarification.

We believe that the Scripture of the New Testament was written by faithful people having a custom that is not acknowledged today. All these writers kept the Sabbath as a day of rest. **No one single writer of the scripture ever kept Sunday** as the day of worshipping God. Isn't that strange? “And [Jesus] came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as **his custom was**, he went into the synagogue **on the sabbath** day, and stood up for to read” (Luke 4:16).

While we claim our Christian roots are deeply anchored in the Scripture, how come all of a sudden we cannot follow Scripture by respecting the biblical Sabbath? The only true answer to this dilemma can be found only in human tradition.

Different inquiries may lead us to various explanations. Some of them were extremely sincere, some very bold and frank, some answers were very pitiful in nature, regretting the fact that Sundaykeeping may not be biblical—but due to the tradition, we supposedly must keep it as an irreversible process; society cannot turn back to the origins and start all over again. Let us examine a few opinions coming from various theologians on the subject:

LEADING CATHOLIC THEOLOGIAN SPEAK UP:

“Sunday is founded, not on Scripture, but on tradition, and is distinctly a Catholic institution. As there is no Scripture for the transfer of the day of rest from the last to the first day of the week, Protestants ought to keep their Sabbath on Saturday and thus leave Catholics in full possession of Sunday.”⁷

“You may read the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, and you will not find a single line authorizing the sanctification of Sunday. The Scriptures enforce the religious observance of Saturday, a day which we never sanctify.”⁸

“If Protestants would follow the Bible, they should worship God on the Sabbath Day. In keeping Sunday they are following a law of the Catholic Church.”⁹

“If you follow the Bible alone there can be no question that you are obliged to keep Saturday holy, since that is the day especially prescribed by Almighty God to be kept holy to the Lord.”¹⁰

“Reason and common sense demand the acceptance of one or the other of these alternatives; either Protestantism and the keeping of Saturday or Catholicity and the keeping of Sunday. Compromise is impossible.”¹¹

HOW DO LEADING PROTESTANT THEOLOGIAN SEE THIS ISSUE?

The Anglican theologian: “There is no word, no hint, in the New Testament about abstaining from work on Sunday. . . . Into the

rest of Sunday [i.e., Sunday as a day of rest and worship] no divine law enters. . . . The observance of Ash Wednesday or Lent stands on exactly the same footing as the observance of Sunday.”¹²

The Baptist theologian: “There was and is a commandment to keep holy the Sabbath day; but that Sabbath was not Sunday. It will, however, be said with some show of triumph that the Sabbath was transferred from the seventh day to the first day of the week. . . . Where can the record of such a transaction be found?—Not in the New Testament, absolutely not. There is no scriptural evidence of the change of the Sabbath institution from the seventh to the first day of the week.

“To me [it] seems unaccountable that Jesus, during three years’ intercourse with His disciples, often conversing with them upon the Sabbath question . . . never alluded to any transference of the day; also that during forty days of His resurrection life, no such thing was intimated.

“Of course, I quite well know that Sunday did come into use in early Christian history as a religious day as we learn from the Christian fathers and other sources. But what a pity that it comes branded with the mark of paganism, and christened with the name of the sun god, when adopted and sanctioned by the papal apostasy, and bequeathed as a sacred legacy to Protestantism!”¹³

The Church of Christ theologian: “We do not find any direct command from God, or instruction from the risen Christ, or admonition from the early apostles, that the first day is to be substituted for the seventh day Sabbath.” “Let us be clear on this point. Though to the Christian ‘that day, the first day of the week’ is the most memorable of all days . . . there is no command or warrant in the New Testament for observing it as a ‘holy day’.” “The Roman Church selected the first day of the week in honour of the resurrection of Christ.”¹⁴

The Congregationalist theologian: “It is clear that, however rigidly or devoutly we may spend Sunday, we are not keeping the Sabbath . . . [The] Sabbath was founded on

a specific divine command. We can plead no such command for the obligation to observe Sunday. . . . There is not a single sentence in the New Testament to suggest that we incur any penalty by violating the supposed sanctity of Sunday.”¹⁵

The Lutheran theologian: “They [the Catholics] allege the Sabbath changed into Sunday, the Lord’s day, contrary to the decalogue, as it appears, neither is there any example more boasted of than the changing of the Sabbath day. Great, they say, is the power and authority of the church, since it dispensed with one of the Ten Commandments.”¹⁶

The Methodist theologian: “The people became Christians and were ruled by an emperor named Constantine [A.D. 312–327]. This emperor made Sunday the Christian Sabbath, because of the blessing of light and heat which came from the sun. So our Sunday is a Sunday, isn’t it?”¹⁷

The Presbyterian theologian: “The Sabbath is part of the Decalogue—the Ten Commandments. This alone forever settles the question as to the perpetuity of the institution. . . . Until therefore it can be shown that the whole moral law has been repealed, the Sabbath will stand. . . . The teaching of Christ confirms the perpetuity of the Sabbath.”¹⁸

So, after so many “blank” declarations, I believe there is no need of further evidence to conclude that today the Christian world regards human tradition above the Bible. The Roman Church holds the pre-eminence—not only before the Protestant churches, but before the entire world. Today the voice of Rome is the ultimate mentoring voice for Christians and non-Christians. Rome is the religious and political capital of the entire world. We do not know if Christ has any place left over as the Commander and Saviour of humanity. But one thing is certain: History will be repeated in the last generation with those poor and insignificant followers of Christ. For tradition, people will persecute again—and innocent children, parents and grandparents will be the object of universal execration.

The following question knocks at the door of our conscience: What

The way of tradition is easy; it is the way of popular current, because it's natural and human, but walking in the light of Christ is like walking against the current.

shall be our stand on the matter of tradition versus the Word of God? Are we going to persecute in the name of tradition, or suffer persecution for the sake of the Word of God? The Bible warns us: "And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for my name' sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved" (Matthew 10:21, 22).

CONCLUSION:

I come from a country where respect for the elderly was a must. To travel on the bus and continue to sit down while an old lady was standing beside me was a "no-no." Our tradition was to respect the elderly. To stand up and offer your seat to an elderly person was a good tradition, a tradition supported by the Holy Scripture as well. To wash your hands before eating was a good tradition, to be hospitable was a good tradition, to maintain the sacredness of family, and to have the decency to preserve your privacy without allowing others to know when you brush your spiritual teeth was a good tradition. So, the list can continue with good human traditions that we gradually lose.

The problem is that the following Bible verse is unique because relates the tradition of respect to parents reflected mandatorily in the fifth commandment and the fourth commandment:

"Ye shall fear every man his mother, and his father, and keep my sabbaths: I am the LORD your God" (Leviticus 19:3).

This is the only Bible verse that shows the connection between two of the most important parts of the law. The fifth commandment teaches us respect for the earthly parents

and the fourth commandment teaches us respect for the Heavenly Father. If we do not respect our Heavenly Father by keeping the Sabbath of the Lord, then that is like violating the fifth commandment, disrespecting our parents. This is why God in His wisdom left this extraordinary link or chain in this specific Bible verse—to show the importance of both commandments as equally important and impossible to separate without breaking the chain of the Ten Commandments. This is what we call good biblical tradition.

On the other hand, if you meet people that may ask you money to forgive your sin, you must know that that is a nonbiblical tradition, and together with the apostle Peter we would utter the words of admonishment: "Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money" (Acts 8:20).

Or if you may meet people that say that they have come to change the times and the law of God, share with them the apostle's view on the matter: "For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ" (2 Corinthians 2:17). That is a bad tradition and it is the work of Antichrist. Be ready to respond to the human tradition with the word of God, the only reliable authority.

If you meet someone that tells you that he holds the power of God on earth, acting like God, tell him that this is a bad human tradition, and answer with the word of God: "I am the LORD: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images" (Isaiah 42:8).

Any time when human tradition is forced upon the conscience of people, the wrath of Cain is at work. And following the same pattern in human history you will discover the

same human behavior; Cain got upset at God because He could not accept his human tradition. Cain was very upset to the point of even killing his brother. Why? Because Abel obeyed the word of God, but Cain was replacing the command of God with his personal choice of worship. Today we would boldly call it human tradition.

In the last generation and the closer we come to the end of time—which is the end of the suffering and misery of this world—the more we'll see the spirit of Cain manifested in the children of disobedience. Human tradition took human lives in the past and will repeat its course again before Christ's return. I pray that the God of all mercy will help us to be firm on our biblical conviction and our firmness to the Word of God as Martin Luther said: "They have already destroyed my honor and reputation. One single thing remains; it is my wretched body: let them take it; they will thus shorten my life by a few hours. But as for my soul, they cannot take that. He who desires to proclaim the Word of Christ to the world must expect death at every moment."¹⁹ *R*

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A Friend Forever

One of the saddest things in life is to lose a best friend. Sometimes a person can be your playmate and best friend for months—and then switch to a different best friend all of a sudden. Many things can cause this to happen and often we don't even know why.

Maybe we said or did something proud or wrong or we had a bad habit that disappointed our friend. It's wise to stop and think if something like that might be why. But many, many times, it's nothing we did wrong at all. Jesus never did anything wrong in His whole life on earth. But this happened to Him.

It did not surprise Jesus; He knew it was going to happen ahead of time. In a prophecy given in the book of Psalms, it is written:

"All that hate me whisper together against me: against me do they devise my hurt. An evil disease, say they, cleaveth fast unto him: and now that he lieth he shall rise up no more. Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me" (Psalm 41:7-9).

This kind of thing will happen more in the future. "Then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another" (Matthew 24:10).

It's sad to think about this, but it's better to know ahead of time than to be surprised. When we see prophecy fulfilled, it makes us love and trust our wonderful Jesus even more—because it reminds us that He knows everything and always tells us the truth.

If we lose a friend, then we can always find a way to make another. The Bible tells us how: "A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly" (Proverbs 18:24, first part). And even when we feel friendless, we can still remember the second part of the verse: "There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother" and "He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Proverbs 18:24 second part; Hebrews 13:5). Yes, that Friend who never leaves us or forsakes us is Jesus. "His is a love that fails not nor forsakes." (*Education*, p. 90.)

What's really amazing is that when we finally get to see Jesus in person, "one shall say unto him, What are these wounds in thine hands? Then he shall answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends" (Zechariah 13:6).

How forgiving is our Lord! After all He suffered, He will say that the place where He was crucified was the house of His "friends"! May we be as kindhearted as He! —BHM

