



Seek The Old Paths

“Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths. . . and walk therein”
(Jeremiah 6:16)

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A QUESTION FOR ATHEISTS “IS THE UNIVERSE AN ACCIDENT?”

Jon Gary Williams

*It is so uplifting and encouraging to believe in an eternal God
and to trust in Him.*

Years ago while traveling by train from Dallas to Houston, I became acquainted with a young man about 25 years of age. He was finishing his PhD work in psychology. As we introduced ourselves and having learned I was a minister, he seemed pleased to let me know he did not believe in the existence of God. As we traveled on, I took advantage of his comment and asked him a simple question, “Do you believe the universe came about by accident?” I could tell by his hesitation and the wondering look on his face that he had never been asked this question. After a moment he said, “Well, I wouldn’t put it that way.” I then asked, “Why not?” He paused, trying to find an answer. I followed up by asking, “If the universe did not come about by accident, then how would you explain its existence?”

I told him that from a materialistic point of view, it seems the only explanation for the existence of the universe is that it just somehow happened — it was just a happenstance. Yet, he could not bring himself to accept this. But why? Because to him, the term “accident” would cast a doubtful reflection on the atheistic view of origins. I went on to ask him if he believed it was possible that the universe could have never existed. He thought a moment and answered yes. I followed by saying, “Then there was

a 50/50 chance of its existence — it could have or could not have existed.” He agreed. So I said, “Then the universe was really just an accident wasn’t it?” But he was still reluctant to agree. I then told him why using the term “accident” was relevant; because there is only one other possible explanation for the existence of the universe — that it was planned. I asked if he agreed with this. He didn’t want to, but I knew he could see the logic of my point. Then I asked him which was the most rational: a planned universe or an accidental universe? I then pressed him to explain the logic of the universe just accidentally occurring. He told me he would have to think about that.

I then switched to the idea of eternal existence. I asked him if he believed there was ever a point at which nothing at all existed — absolutely nothing. Not having ever faced such a question, he was not sure how to respond. I told him that I had no trouble answering it — that there could have never been a time when there was nothing. Then I asked him if he believed it was possible for something to literally come from nothing. After another moment he said no. I then suggested that since something cannot come from nothing, there must be something that has always existed, something that never had a begin-

ning. He said he had never thought about it like that. So I offered him yet another question. “What could it be that has always existed?” I suggested the only opposite views: it was either eternal mind or eternal matter. I asked him which view seemed to be more reasonable? He did not respond. So I then asked him to explain the rationale of believing that lifeless, dead matter is somehow, of itself, eternal. He continued pondering.

Then I asked him if he believed the popular “big bang” theory — that the universe began with a super-gigantic explosion. As I suspected, he said yes. But when I showed him how this theory contradicts the view that matter is eternal, his confused look was obvious. He could see that he was believing two contradictory ideas. As we arrived at Houston, I asked him if we could continue our discussion by mail. He avoided giving an answer.

I’ve sometimes thought about him, wondering if our discussion had caused him to question his belief in atheism. This young man is only one of many people who fall under Paul’s indictment of being “without excuse” and possessing a darkened, “foolish heart” (Rom. 1:20-21). No wonder that two times the Bible says, “*The fool*

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A Question For Atheists...



Editorial...

SAINTS & SINNERS

Garland M. Robinson

The Bible speaks of both SAINTS (98 verses) and SINNERS (88 verses). We find the words: sin (388), sinned (114), sinneth (20), and sinner(s) (88) times.

We often hear the expression “I’m no saint. We’re all sinners.” But, is this an accurate representation of faithful Christians? No, it’s not. There’s a major difference between “saints” and “sinners.” Let’s note some of the differences.

While both Saints and Sinners sin, Saints are forgiven of their sins, whereas Sinners are not. Though saints sin (being human), they are not “sinners.” Sinners allow sin to rule their lives. Saints do not allow sin to rule their lives. Paul made this clear in Romans 6. Saints do not “serve sin” (v.6). Sin does not reign in saints (v.12). Sin does not have dominion over us (v.14). Yet sin is common to every human being. Romans 3:10, “There is none righteous, no, not one.” Romans 3:23-26, “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.” Romans 2:28-29, “For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.” Saints live constantly in obedience to God and thereby receive continual forgiveness. First John 1:7-2:6, “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not

in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us [our] sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for [the sins of] the whole world. And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him. He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.”

Romans 4:24-5:2, Abraham’s trust and obedience to God made him counted as righteous by God. “But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification. Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”

Saints obey God and are forgiven, Sinners do not obey God and are not forgiven. First Peter 4:17, “For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God:

and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?”

Romans 2:5-11, “But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; Who will render to every man according to his deeds: To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life: But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile; But glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile: For there is no respect of persons with God.”

Saints are devoted to living for the Lord. Sinners are devoted to living for themselves. Romans 6:12-18, As saints... “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid. Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.”

Saints seek to please God above all else. Sinners do not seek to please God. Matthew 6:33, “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.” Colossians 3:1-3, “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.” Romans 8:4-10, “That the righteousness of the law might be

fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God. But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.”

Saints worship God acceptably. Sinners do not worship God acceptably. Gen. 4:2-5, “...Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering: But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect...” Hebrews 11:4, “By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.” Romans 10:17, “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”

Saints worship God regularly, on a consistent basis and would not dream of doing otherwise. Sinners do not worship God at all or they attend with a hit or miss attitude, cherry picking when they will worship and when they won't. Hebrews 10:22-31, “Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching. For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judg-

ment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

Saints love one another with an unselfish love. Sinners do not love one another. John 13:34-35, “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” Ephesians 4:31-5:2, “Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you. Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.”

Saints are forgiving. Sinners are not forgiving. Luke 6:37, “...forgive, and ye shall be forgiven.” Luke 17:3-4, “Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him.” Colossians 3:12-14, “Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.”

Saints endeavor to teach and spread God's word around the world. Sinners have no intention of teaching and obeying the Scriptures. Matthew 28:18-20, “And

Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.” Luke 4:43-44, “And he said unto them, I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also: for therefore am I sent. And he preached in the synagogues of Galilee.” Jonah 1:1-2, “Now the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me.” Matthew 24:14, “And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.” Luke 24:46-47, “And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.” Acts 26:16-19, “But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me. Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision.”

A Question For Atheists...

(Continued from page 32)

hath said in his heart, there is no God” (Psa. 14:1; 53:1).

It is so uplifting and encouraging to believe in an eternal God and to trust in Him. With such a belief, as Christians, we are kept strong and faithful. And it is this kind of belief that can lead lost people to salvation.

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MARRIAGE IS NOT... #4

Bill Boyd

Marriage is not for those who think they are perfect, neither is it for those who expect their spouses to be perfect. God requires us to be faithful, but knows we will not be flawless. He knew we would not be flawless when he joined us together. He designed marriage for those who are both imperfect and gracious.

Hosea teaches us that marriage is not for the perfect, but for the gracious. In his book, the prophet gave us one of the most beautiful pledges of love in all literature: *“I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the LORD”* (Hosea 2:6-7). These lovely lines are words worthy of wedding vows. The trouble is the context. Perhaps we would hear more of them in weddings were it not for their story, for it is a story of betrayal, heartbreak, bitterness, and wrath.

Hosea was a prophet to northern Israel. He is the only writing prophet to come from northern Israel. Amos was a prophet to Northern Israel, but he came from Tekoa in Judea. God’s wrath against Israel was proclaimed by the thunderous Amos, but God’s love for Israel is revealed by the weeping Hosea. God prepared Hosea’s heart for his prophecy.

Israel had been unfaithful to the LORD. They had sacrificed unto Baal. “Whoredom” is the word given to the prophets to describe this apostasy, and it is an apt description, for Baal was a Canaanite fertility god, and part of the homage paid to Baal was a fornication ritual with temple prostitutes. God loved Israel, but their whoredom with Baal was a bitter grief to him. God wanted to send Israel a prophet that could preach with the passion he himself was feeling, so he chose Hosea. The prophet had been prepared for this burden. *“The LORD said to Hosea, Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms and children of whoredoms: for the land hath committed great whoredom, departing from the LORD”* (Hosea 1:2). Hosea took Gomer to be his wife, and she had played the harlot against him. She bore him children who were not his, and then forsook him for her

lovers, until they forsook her.

Gomer’s children are called “children of whoredom.” Here is the text: *“they be the children of whoredoms. For their mother hath played the harlot: she that conceived them hath done shamefully”* (Hosea 2:4-5). Perhaps Gomer’s first born was of Hosea, for the text says that she *“conceived, and bare him a son”* (Hosea 1:3). The LORD said, *“Call his name Jezreel”* (Hosea 1:4). The name “Jezreel” can mean “to sow” but here it means “to scatter,” because God was going to scatter Israel among the nations. Gomer *“conceived again, and bore a daughter”* but the text does not say that she bore Hosea a daughter. God said, *“Call her name Loruhamah.”* The name “Ruhama” means “spared by mercy,” but the “Lo-” at the beginning of her name is there as a negation, therefore the name “Loruhamah” means “not spared” and “no mercy.” *“...For I will no more have mercy upon the house of Israel”* (Hosea 1:6). For a third time Gomer *“conceived, and bare a son”* (Hosea 1:8), but again, it does not say that she bore Hosea a son. God said to Hosea, *“Call his name Loammi.”* The name means “not my people.” God made the application to Israel saying, *“for ye are not my people, and I will not be your God”* (Hosea 1:9).

Hosea would plead with Gomer to repent, so also, through Hosea, the LORD would plead with Israel. The grief and anger in the heart of Hosea became so like the grief and anger in the LORD’s heart that in their pleading it is difficult to distinguish between them. God put Israel away, but he would take Israel back, so also God told Hosea to take Gomer back. “Jezreel” would no longer mean “scattered” but “sown,” for they would be sown into the land to be fruitful (Hosea 1:11). “Loruhamah” would be called “Ruhamah,” for she who had not been spared by mercy would be spared by mercy. “Loammi” would be called

“Ammi,” for God said, *“it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God”* (Hosea 1:10).

Hosea bought Gomer back for the price of a slave. He spoke comfortably to her (Hosea 2:14), and sought her heart by promising to be a loving husband “Ishi,” and not a lording husband “Baali” (Hosea 2:16). Hosea did this, in part, to demonstrate God’s own broken heart and love for his people. Again the prophet would say, *“I will sow her unto me in the earth; and I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy; and I will say to them which were not my people, Thou art my people; and they shall say, Thou art my God”* (Hosea 2:23). The words “ye shall be called the sons of God” are quoted in Romans 9:25-26 in reference to the Gentiles receiving the Gospel, for Israel would be scattered among the nations, and their descendants counted as Gentiles, but they would again become God’s people when, with the Gentiles, they would be added to his church. Go back and read those words again. They are not spoken for Israel only. These words reflect the loving commitment God makes to us when he takes us back after our sin.

Here is what Hosea teaches us about marriage. As Hosea loved Gomer, so ought husbands to love their wives, and so ought wives to love their husbands. A long marriage is a testimony to the power of patience, lovingkindness, and forgiveness. A man may put his wife away for fornication (Matt. 19:9), and a wife her husband (Mark 10:12), but they are not compelled to do so. It may be that they can be reconciled; it may be that they cannot be reconciled. When it comes to reconciliation, we must acknowledge, respect, and support the choice of the offended, for that is a choice given of God. How-

ever, reconciled or not, we ought to seek and give forgiveness, for this is also of God.

There are many failures that can occur in a marriage, yet short of fornication, the married are to remain married. My father-in-law preformed the marriage ceremony between his daughter and me. In the ceremony he looked at one at a time as he said, “Lori, Bill is not perfect, and Bill, Lori is not perfect.” Then he said to us both, “I think it would be very difficult to be married to someone who was perfect.”

We should think on this when our spouse is not perfect. We knew they were not perfect when we married them, and we need to remember that we are not perfect either. It is because we are not perfect that we need each other. It is in the areas wherein our spouse is not perfect that we can complete them, show our love through our grace, and cover for them.

Paul wrote in Colossians 3:19, “*Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them.*” A gracious man will not be bitter against his

wife, and neither will a gracious woman resent her imperfect husband. Marriage is not for those who think they are perfect, neither is it for those who expect their spouses to be perfect. God requires us to be faithful, but knows we will not be flawless. He knew we would not be flawless when he joined us together. He designed marriage for those who are both imperfect and gracious.

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TEN REASONS WHY CHRISTIANS DO NOT ATTEND DANCES LIKE THE PROM

Jason Patrick Hilburn

1. Because the main purpose of the event is to do something God condemns — committing lasciviousness (indecent dress, touching, and/or body movements that stir up lust). (Gen. 39:12; Matt. 4:3-4; 5:28; Gal. 5:19-21; Col. 3:17; 1 Thess. 5:21-22; 1 Tim. 2:9-10; 1 Peter 4:3-4).

2. Because we don't want to support/embolden/encourage those who are sinning by our attendance (1 Cor. 10:23-33; Eph. 5:11-12; 1 Tim. 5:22; 1 Peter 4:4; cf. 2 Cor. 6:14-18; 2 John 11).

3. Because we don't want to give anyone, whether Christians or non-Christians, the impression that we condone sin (1 Cor. 8:9-13; 10:23-33; Eph. 5:11; Rom. 14:7,13,16; 1 Peter 2:12).

4. Because we don't want to be tempted to sin, and we don't want to tempt others to sin (Joshua 7:21; 2 Samuel 11:2-4; Matt. 4:3-4; 14:6; 18:6-7; Rom. 13:14; Phil. 4:8; 1 Thess. 3:5; 5:22; 2 Tim. 2:22; 1 Peter 2:11; James 1:13).

5. Because God wants us to protect our reputations, which will also cause Him to be glorified (Prov. 22:1; Eccl. 7:1; Matt. 5:16; 1 Cor. 6:18-20; 10:31; 1 Tim. 4:12; 1 Peter 2:12).

6. Because we must be holy — different from the world (Exodus 23:2; John 17:17; Rom. 6:1-23; 12:1-2; 2 Cor. 5:17; Titus 2:11-14; 1 Peter 1:15-16; James 1:27; 4:4,7; 1 John 2:15-17).

7. Because we would rather seem strange to the world than be strangers to God (Matt. 7:21-23; John 15:18-19; Acts 17:20; Eph. 2:12; Titus 2:14; James 4:4; 1 Peter 2:9-12; 4:4; 1 John 2:3-4).

8. Because we absolutely hate evil, knowing that sin is what caused our Savior to die the most excruciating death (Psalm 119:104, 128; Isaiah 52:14; 53:3-11; Matt. 26:28; 27:24-54; Rom. 1:32; 5:8; 12:9; 1 Cor. 16:13; 2 Cor. 5:21).

9. Because we are in love with righteousness, knowing that our God is the embodiment of righteousness (Psalm 116:5; Rom. 12:9; 1 Cor. 13:6; Heb. 1:9).

10. Because we love God more than anything/anyone, and our greatest desire is to be in Heaven with Him (Eccl. 11:9; Matt. 6:33; 22:36-40; 25:34; John 12:48; 14:1-6; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; Gal. 5:19-21; Phil. 1:21; Col. 1:5; 3:1-3; Heb. 11:13-16; 1 Peter 1:3, 4; 2 Peter 3:10-13).

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Debits	
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Web space (3yrs)	\$397.26
Supplies	\$46.94
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(Dis)RESPECT OF MARRIAGE ACT?!

Johnny O. Trail

Our culture is already intolerant of true, biblical morality. How long will it be before Christians are in a voting minority and unable to have a political voice to offer objections to laws and policies that contravene God's laws?

The United States senate in all its wisdom has sought to codify the *Obergefell v. Hodges* Supreme Court decision that forced states to recognize marriages between same sex individuals. The first action of the post-election legislative body was to pass the Respect of Marriage Act. Never mind the economic and foreign policy problems that we are facing right now — we are more interested in helping people engage in immoral marital unions.

Instead of defending marriage, the Respect of Marriage Act makes a mockery of a God organized and God ordained institution. While one aspect of the act does codify interracial marriage, the other portions are highly objectionable. This act along with the Obergefell decision has opened Pandora's box regarding the definition of legal marriage.

After the senate passed the resolution, Senator Ted Cruz tweeted the following comment, "Not only does the so-called Respect for Marriage Act open the door for a weaponized IRS to target religious non-profits, but it will start a race to the bottom, forcing the most extreme marriage laws from any state onto every other state."

While the bill does not force churches or religious organizations to "solemnize" same-sex unions, it does create problems with non-profit religious groups that receive tax exemptions or funds from the federal government. In its final summation, the bill will impact the ability of religious groups to conscientiously serve others.

Thus, the Defense of Marriage Act and the Obergefell decision could also threaten religious liberties. One might speculate that any Christian university or organization that does not recognize same sex marriages could stand to be the object of a lawsuit or lose government funding for failing to endorse this immoral act. In these things, we see a real attack on religious liberty

and the freedom of speech.

In determining the tax-exempt status of organizations, the IRS seeks to determine if said organization falls within the criteria of exemption from paying taxes. One source avers, "When the IRS determines whether an organization is 'charitable' under the Internal Revenue Code, it asks whether the entity's conduct is 'contrary to public policy' or violates a 'national policy'." [1] This piece of legislation could effectively remove funding from adoption agencies who are conscientiously, and religiously opposed to allowing same sex married individuals to adopt children because it violates a national or public policy.

Our nation is moving closer and closer to being very much like the Roman Empire and its view of Christianity. When Christians would not conform to the debauchery and polytheistic worship practices of the empire, Rome sought to destroy Christianity. One writer states,

The religions that Rome had the most problems with were monotheistic — Judaism and Christianity. Because these religions believed there was just one god, they prohibited worshipping other gods. Their members refused to make offerings to Roman gods or take part in Roman religious festivals, which Rome considered a matter of showing loyalty. These religions tested Roman tolerance [Emp. — JOT]. [2]

Did you catch that last sentence? Religions that practiced biblical principles "tested Roman tolerance." Our society is tolerant of anything but biblical morality that challenges people to repent and live lives in accordance with God's word.

Our culture is already intolerant of true, biblical morality. How long

will it be before Christians are in a voting minority and unable to have a political voice to offer objections to laws and policies that contravene God's laws? For these reasons alone, we must engage the culture in personal evangelism.

The Bible teaches that God alone is the one who designed marriage. No culture or person came up with this concept on their own. Marriage was designed by God to be monogamous, heterosexual, and long lasting in nature. Notice the words of the Master regarding what God intended for marriage. Matthew 19:4-5 says, "And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." This was marriage as God meant from the beginning of the creation.

In our nation, the floodgates have been opened in defining what constitutes a marriage. How long before our nation recognizes polygamous marriage? One shudders to imagine how far our nation will go in codifying immorality. Proverbs 14:34 says, "Righteousness exalts a nation, But sin is a reproach to any people."

[1] Baylor, Gregory S. (2022). "What You Should Know About the Respect for Marriage Act," Alliance Defending Freedom. <https://adflegal.org>.

[2] "Religious Tolerance and Persecution in the Roman Empire." Constitutional Rights Foundation (crf-usa.org)

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"I BELIEVE THE LORD, BUT..."

Marvin L. Weir

Spiritual matters take priority over worldly matters.

Many people who profess to be Christians would angrily protest if they were told they did not believe the Lord. A failure to believe Christ is not a new problem. During His earthly ministry, Jesus said to the Jews, "And ye have not his word abiding in you: for whom he hath sent, him ye believe not" (John 5:38). Jesus repeated His indictment again, saying, "For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words" (John 5:46-47).

Words have meaning! Jesus forthrightly declares, "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day" (John 12:48). The majority of people who profess belief in the Lord (that He exists) do not believe Christ (obey his word)! Proof will be offered to back up this assertion.

Members of religious denominations claim to believe in Christ, but they do not believe what He said about building His church. Jesus clearly states, "I will build my church" (Matt. 16:18). One cannot believe this statement of the Lord and believe that He intended to build many different churches! Man has absolutely no right or authority to establish or build a church. Paul affirms Christ's teaching on this matter in saying, "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as also ye were called in one hope of your calling" (Eph. 4:4). Speaking by inspiration, Paul proclaims, "For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free; and were all made to drink of one Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:13). The Lord's church is blood bought (Acts 20:28), and did not originate in the mind of man. Christ is "...head over all things to the church, which is his body" (Eph. 1:22-23). One cannot deny the singular nature of "the church" (the one and only church)! The Lord has promised to one day save His body [church] (Eph. 5:23) — but not multiple man-made religious bodies teaching contrary to His divine

will! Those who align themselves with "churches" established by men may believe in Christ (that He exists), but they **do not** believe nor obey what He taught.

Many people believe in Christ but do not believe what He said about being called by the Gospel. It is not unusual to hear one talk about his "experience" that occurred before he was "saved." Just about every one of these "experiences" told to me differs from every other person's supposed "experience." The truth is that the Bible mentions nothing about any "experience" preceding one's salvation. Please realize that one will search the Scriptures in vain for an "experience" that he or she had before being saved. Every person called by the Lord is called in exactly the same way — by the precious Gospel (2 Thess. 2:14). The Lord's plan for one to become a member of His church requires *Hearing His Word* (Rom. 10:17), *Belief* (Heb. 11:6), *Repentance* (Luke 13:3), *Confession* (Rom. 10:9-10), and *water Baptism* for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). Nothing else is included in God's plan for man to be saved. The Gospel is the **only** "power of God unto salvation" (Rom. 1:16), whether Jew or Gentile! One may believe in Christ, but he does not believe Christ if he refuses to obey His Gospel plan of salvation.

Many church members believe in Christ but do not believe what He said regarding the kingdom of God being first in their lives. The world we live in is a busy place. There is always something to do. However, the Lord has instructed believers to "seek...first his kingdom, and his righteousness" (Matt. 6:33). Brethren must learn that spiritual matters take priority over worldly matters. One fails miserably to seek the kingdom first when he allows things such as sports, company, school activities, recreation, or vacation take priority over assembling with the saints to worship God. The Scriptures nowhere states that decent and legitimate activities are to be sought first in one's life! No amount of excuses or rationalizations will demote spiritual matters into second

place. Brethren may believe in Christ, but they do not believe what He said in Matthew 6:33 when they allow worldly activities (no matter how good and innocent) to cause them to **forsake** assembling with the saints (Heb. 10:25).

Some brethren believe in Christ but do not believe what He said about those outside of His body being lost! It has already been established that there is a Gospel plan of salvation. Jesus said, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16). The Lord did not say, "He that believeth and is not baptized shall be saved," but this is exactly what those of denominational persuasion teach. Sadly, many brethren today are convinced there will be saved people who are **not** members of the Lord's church! The word of the Lord declares that salvation is **IN** Christ (2 Tim. 2:10), and that one is "baptized INTO Christ" (Rom. 6:4; Gal. 3:27). Paul understood and taught that vengeance will be rendered to "...them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power" (2 Thess. 1:8-9).

One may claim to know the Lord while refusing to obey His will, but John writes, "He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John 2:4). One does **not** believe Christ who refuses to **obey** Him!

No person can refuse to obey the Lord's commands and expect to go to heaven. God's great love and mercy for man does not negate obedience! Never forget what is taught in Hebrews 5:8-9: "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him" Christ is not the author of eternal life to those who merely believe in Him, but to those who believe "and obey Him."



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Spaniards were in terrible physical condition. They looked the picture of death itself, their lips parched and swollen. They were literally dying of thirst. “Can we help you?” shouted the Peruvians. The Spaniards cried out, “Water! Water! We need fresh water!” The Peruvian sailors, surprised at this request, told them to lower their buckets and help themselves. The Spaniards, fearing they’d been misunderstood cried back, “No, no we need FRESH water! But they received the same reply from the Peruvians to lower their buckets and help themselves. They finally did lower their buckets into the ocean waters and when they brought the buckets on deck they discovered to their amazement fresh water. They had quit trying. There at the mouth of the Amazon river, anchored for days, too far from land to see the coast, but not too far from the mouth of the River, they had fresh water in abundance. Apathy had over taken them and they had quit. They were resigned to die when all that was needed was to lower their bucket. A small effort would have made all the difference.

How many today have given up thinking there is no hope, when only a little more effort would have made all the difference in the world? Many times the solution to our problems is right before us if we will just “lower our buckets.” A little more effort may be all that is needed. Beloved, *“let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not”* (Gal. 6:9).

Tom Moore, Old Paths Studies, Aug. 2021

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APATHY IS THE OPPOSITE OF FAITH

Some years ago in South America, a crew of Peruvian Sailors, heading up the Amazon River came upon a strange sight. It was like a scene from “The Twilight Zone.” A Spanish ship was anchored off the coast and all the sailors were stretched out weakly on the deck of the ship. As the Peruvians drew closer, they saw that the