



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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GOD CREATED THE EARTH

Jon Gary Williams

We seldom see lessons on this place we call home, and yet, our whole lives are centered on this marvelous globe. How much do we know about it? Or, still better, how much do we not know about it?

The earth spins at about 1,000 mph, but it's powerful, gravitational force keeps everything from flying off into space. And, we still do not completely know how this works. As the earth circles the Sun, it travels at a fantastic speed of near 67,000 mph. This means that from the moment you are now reading this, in six months, you will be 93,000,000 miles on the other side of the Sun. So, you are, indeed, a space traveler. What a truly awe-inspiring world this is — that we call our dwelling place.

In this article we are looking at the earth from three perspectives: **The Earth's Beginning, The Earth's Transformation, and The Earth's Ending.**

THE EARTH'S BEGINNING

How do we explain the existence of the earth? Why does it exist? Where did it come from? When did it happen? Is it just an accident? Well, the earth had to come from somewhere! And, only three explanations have been offered.

1. The earth has always existed. In other words, it had no beginning. But this makes no sense. Logic tells us the earth cannot, of itself, be eternal. This is really no explanation. Somewhere, at some point, the earth had to have a beginning.

2. The earth came about spon-

taneously. This means that the earth arose apart from any external cause. Somehow, somehow, it brought itself into existence. Or, as some express it, the universe came from nothing. This is called the *inflationary model*. “The inflationary model of the universe provides a possible mechanism by which the observed universe could have evolved from an infinitesimal region. It is then tempting to go one step further and speculate that the entire universe evolved from literally nothing” (*Scientific American*, May 1984, p.128). Such a view is not only illogical, it is absurd.

3. The earth was created. It was “caused” to exist. This is the only explanation making sense. This means there had to be a preexisting source — a creator. And, this calls for a super-intelligent, powerful, eternal Being. Our earth was created by God. And, God had the earth's beginning recorded.

“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” Gen. 1:1). But, what does this mean? There had to be a special place for the earth to exist. Before creation, the only realm that existed was God's completely spiritual realm — nothing physical could exist there. So God created “heaven,” or “space” — a place compatible for a physical, material earth to exist.

God's plan for all creation took place during a period of six normal 24hr days. However, some, to allow space for billions of years for evolution, place a giant gap between verses five and six of Genesis one. This theory says that verses one through five com-

pose an “initial creation” of space and earth — or an extremely “long day” — a “day” of billions of years. Then, this theory says that at verse six begins the normal five days of creation.

This view, of course, is terribly false. The Bible clearly shows that the total of creation took place within a normal six day period. *“For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it”* (Exodus 20:11). Everything, including heaven and earth, appeared in that first week. There is no such “gap” to allow for billions of years.

THE EARTH'S TRANSFORMATION

This, of course, has to do with the great worldwide flood which took place at the time of Noah. Through the years, man had filled the earth with vile corruption. The human race had become so wicked and debased that God made the devastating decision to blot man from the earth.

“And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have

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God Created The Earth...



Editorial...

TRUE RICHES

Garland M. Robinson

Jesus said: *“He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon who will commit to your trust the **true riches**?”* (Luke 16:10-11)

Unrighteous mammon is “worldly wealth, money, material possessions that are acquired and used in ungodly ways. It represents temporal resources that can corrupt or compete with God for devotion.” The point of this verse emphasizes using money wisely for eternal, holy, purposes rather than selfish gain.

Generally speaking, man goes his own way. He chooses to do what he wants, what he likes — never thinking about God and eternity. The population of the world is so corrupt, that the apostle John was inspired to write: *“...the whole world lieth in wickedness”* (1 John 5:19). That was true in the first century, just as it is true in every century, certainly including today. But, there is an exception to this general rule. It is a number so infinitesimally small (in comparison to the world’s population) that it is considered negligible. It involves those who have chosen to honor and serve God instead of themselves.

On the day of Pentecost, Peter preached the Gospel for the first time. He declared that God the Father had named Jesus both *“...Lord and Christ. Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. ... And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls”*

(Acts 2:37-41).

At the preaching of Philip, there were many in Samaria who believed him preaching *“...the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women”* (Acts 8:12). Paul assured Christians everywhere that *“the Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity”* (2 Tim. 2:19). In the years ahead we read of saints who had *“...hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Acts 15:26).

Not only had many in the first century obeyed the Gospel and became Christians, there have been many through the centuries who did likewise. Christians are exhorted to continue faithful throughout their life. Revelation 2:10 tells us, *“...be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”*

In accordance with being faithful to the Lord, we follow the admonition of Colossians 3:1-2: *“...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.”* Paul told the brethren in Rome to *“...be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God”* (Rom. 12:2).

How can we fulfill the council and advice given to us in the New Testament? We learn to be RICH, but not in the material things of this world. Instead:

WE ARE TO BE RICH TOWARD GOD

Luke 12:16-21, *“And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my*

*fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that **layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.**”*

We are to invest in eternal, spiritual, treasures instead of worldly and material ones. Jesus made this clear when he said: *“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also”* (Matt. 6:19-21). Are you rich toward God?

WE ARE TO BE RICH IN FAITH

James 2:5, *“Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world **rich in faith**, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?”* In Psalm 31:19 we read, *“Oh how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee; which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men!”* Psalm 145:20, *“The LORD preserveth all them that love him: but all the wicked will he destroy.”* Acts 26:18, Paul was sent to sinners *“...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.”* Jesus said, *“...how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God”* (Mark 10:24-25). Knowing these things, we must endeavor to be rich in the faith of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ — not rich in the things of the world. Are you rich in faith?

WE ARE TO BE RICH IN GOOD WORKS

First Timothy 6:17-19, *“Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy;*

That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.” Matt. 5:16, *“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”* John 5:28-29, *“Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.”* Are you rich in the good works of God?

WE ARE TO BE RICH IN LAYING UP TREASURES IN HEAVEN

Matthew 6:20, *“But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal.”* Matt. 19:21, *“Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.”* 2 Tim. 4:7-8, *“I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.”* Matt. 19:21 *“Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.”* Col. 1:1-6 *“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints, For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel; Which is come unto you, as it is in all the world; and bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you, since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth:”*

Are you rich in laying up treasures in heaven?

God Creted The Earth...

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made them” (Gen. 6:5-7).

While all outside the ark perished, we read that Noah found favor in God’s eyes. *“But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD”* (Gen. 6:8).

But now, what about the condition of the physical earth itself? During the year long global flood devastation, the appearance of the earth was drastically changed. Not only was everything with the “breath of life” destroyed, but because of the cataclysmic action of the global flood, the earth itself underwent a tremendous, almost unbelievable, physical transformation!

The surface of earth was fractured into gigantic pieces. Huge land masses were divided. Great oceans were formed. High mountains were pushed up. The surface of the earth was now completely transformed. Hence, we read, *“In the six hundredth year of Noah’s life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, the same day were all the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened”* (Gen. 7:11).

The fountains of the great deep were the subterranean, volcanic regions of the earth. Notice, this included “all” the fountains — so it was a worldwide, tectonic action. Visualize an egg blown up to the size of a beach ball. However, the egg’s shell remains the same narrow thickness. This illustrates what the thin, outer crust of the earth was like, easily subject to be broken apart.

The worldwide, subterranean “fountains,” caused the outer crust of the earth to undergo tremendous, catastrophic upheavals. The earth’s surface was twisted and torn apart. Today we still see aftermaths of this when volcanos erupt, or when earthquakes shake the outer crust of the earth.

But, we remember: God said he would never again destroy the earth by water, so he placed a rainbow in the sky to serve as a reminder (Gen. 9:13-16).

Yet, what if God had said, “I’m going to bring another global flood! And if you think the first flood was terrible, just wait, this next one will be much worse, for the earth will be completely destroyed!” If that had been God’s plan, every time bad floods would come, people would be asking: “Is this

the end? Is the world about to be over?” But that was not God’s plan. For there is something else awaiting the earth’s ending. And this brings us to the third happening.

THE EARTH’S ENDING

Yes, some day our earth will have a sudden, horrifying conclusion. It will be completely removed — like it had never even existed. Jesus foretold of it’s great ending: *“Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away”* (Matt. 24:35).

The apostle John also foretold of this event. *“And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea”* (Rev. 21:1).

But now, what will this ending actually be like? The apostle Peter speaks of it in dramatic terms.

First, he contrasted it with the dreadful Genesis flood. *“Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men”* (2 Peter 3:6-7). Then Peter gives more specific terrible details. *“But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up”* (2 Peter 3:10-12).

Peter also gives us a wonderful, hopeful message. *“Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless”* (2 Peter 3:13-14).

Think about it — a “new heaven and a new earth!” This is God’s way of describing His own home — heaven itself.

People everywhere need to be made aware that the time is coming when the earth will be no more; and, that time is always growing nearer.

Everyone needs to also know that a home in heaven is waiting. But for whom? Only for those who are preparing to go there — those who Believe and Obey the Lord God.

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OUT-OF-WEDLOCK BIRTHS

Victor M. Eskew

One million, four hundred sixty four thousand, one hundred twenty one (1,464,121). This figure is the number of out-of-wedlock births in the United States in 2022. 40.5% of all births are out-of-wedlock births. Think about that. Four of every ten births involve parents who are not married to one another. The following are the 2022 statistics of out-of-wedlock births by race: Whites (28.4%), Blacks (70.4%), Hispanics (52.8%), American Indians/Alaskans (69.6%), Asians (12.2%). These numbers represent an increase from years gone by. Sadly, the number of out-of-wedlock births has also increased within the body of Christ.

The divine mandate for producing children is no longer honored in our nation. It is not even respected in the hearts of some who call themselves Christians. God created a help meet for Adam (Gen. 2:18, 21-24). It was in their marriage relationship that children were to be brought into the world. *“And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain”* (Gen. 4:1). Adam did not “know” some girl he picked up at the bar on a weekend night. Adam did not “know” his girlfriend. He did not “know” his fiancé. He did not “know” his live-in. Adam “knew” his wife Eve. In the New Testament, the apostle Paul revealed the relationship in which children are to be born when he gave instructions to the younger widows. He wrote: *“I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully”* (1 Tim. 5:14). Notice the order of Paul’s words: marry, then bear children.

Sexual relationships out of wedlock are classified as SIN by God. Fornication is a Bible term that includes numerous sexual sins, including sexual relationships outside of the “marriage bond.” Fornication is condemned over and over in the pages of God’s Word. It was a sin committed by the Gentiles when they refused to retain God in their knowledge (Rom. 2:28-29). Paul told the church at Corinth that it was a sin that would keep one from inheriting the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-10). It is the second sin in-

cluded in Paul’s “works of the flesh” in Galatians 5:19-21. When Paul addressed the church in Ephesus, he commanded that *“fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you as cometh saints”* (Eph. 5:3). One of the problems of the church in Thyatira involved fornication. Jesus rebuked the church with these words: *“...thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols”* (Rev. 2:20).

There are many causes for the increase in out-of-wedlock births.

First, they are encouraged by our present welfare system. The more children a woman has out-of-wedlock the more benefits she will receive from the government.

Second, out-of-wedlock births have increased because the number of ineligible husbands has decreased. Fewer and fewer men are growing up to be mature and responsible individuals. Yes, they will have a sexual relationship, but they are not willing to care for a wife and child. For some reason, some women are seduced by such men to their own detriment.

Third, the increase in contraceptives and abortion have increased out-of-wedlock births. This is interesting because these things were supposed to decrease pregnancies in our nation. Contraceptives do not always work. Too, they are not always used. Then, once a young lady is pregnant, she doesn’t always want to abort the child she knows is growing within her.

Fourth, the promotion of “equal rights” between men and women has increased out-of-wedlock births. Instead of feeling an obligation to marry, men believe they have a right to decline marriage. Some of them encourage the woman to get an abortion. Others choose to support the child without being married to the mother.

Fifth, co-habitation is much more common today. Instead of getting married, men and women live together. In these instances, many women will have two or three children outside of the marriage bond.

Sixth, out-of-wedlock births have

become acceptable to society. There is no longer a sense of shame and embarrassment when a woman gets pregnant out of wedlock. This is true among Christians as well as non-Christians. Instead of things being hush-hush, everyone gets giddy and excited. How God feels about the matter hardly crosses anyone’s mind.

Seventh, out-of-wedlock births are growing more common because we live in a world that no longer respects the holy and authoritative Word of God. Men and women do as they please and satisfy the demands of the flesh, and God is supposed to be okay with their actions. The couple is not concerned about God’s will.

Those who study and research the home refer to homes that have out-of-wedlock births as “fragile families.” Researchers from Princeton University and Columbia University did a study of 5,000 children born out-of-wedlock in large cities between 1998 and 2000. “...Results of the study conclude that compared with ‘traditional families,’ parents of fragile families are more likely to have become parents in their teens, more likely to have had children with other partners, more likely to be poor, suffer from depression, struggle with substance abuse, and to have been incarcerated” (Fragile Families: Most Children Born Out of Wedlock Aren’t OK | HuffPost Women).

The factors just mentioned have a negative impact on the children. That same article continues: “...children of such families produce lower cognitive test scores and a have a higher incidence of aggressive behavior. Furthermore, previous research demonstrates that children who live apart from one of their parents at some point in their childhood are twice as likely to drop out of high school, twice as likely to have a child before age 20, and one and a half times as likely to be out of school or work by their late teens or early 20s.”

Dear reader, Satan is at work in our world, in our nation, in our homes, and in the church. Remember, Peter teaches that Satan is as a roaring lion seeking to bring about destruction (1 Peter 5:8). In 1 Peter 5:9, the apostle

tells us how to deal with this enemy: *“Whom resist steadfast in the faith...”*

We, as the church, must begin to speak up. In fact, we must speak up loudly and boldly against the ungodliness in our world. Too, we MUST make certain God’s precepts are both taught and practiced in our homes. We cannot allow another generation to arise having “no shame” when babies are born out-of-wedlock (See Jer. 6:15; 8:12).

Christians must view out-of-wedlock births for what it is, SIN. Too, we must view this as an attack upon the very foundation of our great nation. If it’s allowed to continue, it will be one of the factors that will contribute to the downfall of the United States of America.

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JUDGMENT MUST FIRST BEGIN WITH THE HOUSE OF GOD

Tracy Dugger

...a reminder to the church to examine itself and to remember that being God’s people is no excuse to ignore any portion of His Word.

Peter writes: *“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? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear”* (1 Peter 4:17-19).

Many hold that Peter refers to a time of persecution in which the church would suffer and that he is not speaking of the final day of judgment. The persecution was the overflow of what would occur in Jerusalem when God punished the Jews for their rejection of the Christ (Matt. 23:36-24:28). I agree and realize this is a more difficult section of Scripture.

I was reading Ezekiel 5-6 recently and was reminded of Judah’s divine punishment due to its false religion, immorality, and hypocrisy. God, through Ezekiel, promised retribution for their sin. It made me think of these verses in 1 Peter 4. Ezekiel makes clear that before Babylon gets their punishment, Judah and Jerusalem will get theirs. Before Assyria got their punishment, Israel (the northern kingdom and Samaria) got theirs.

God sent judgment against Jerusalem in the first century. That judgment served many purposes. One of those purposes was a reminder that God is serious about rejection of His Word. And, when a people reject His Word, there is judgment. That judgment especially includes and often begins with His own people. Did not God’s judgment of Rome include and often begin with the church? Read Revelation 2-3 and see how God promises judgment on those churches or Christians who were not faithful!

Is it a truth that at any kind of divine judgment, that His people who know better, but are not living right, that God will begin with them? If I were a principal at a school, and I was trying to do the right and fair thing, and a group of boys were involved in some bad things, and one of the boys was my son, where would punishment begin if I were to do the righteous thing? With my own child first! In a church, before I condemn the world for an immoral action that is also being practiced by some in the church, would it not be proper to first begin with ourselves? Isn’t this what 1 Corinthians 5 is about? Isn’t Paul dealing with this in Romans 2? He writes in Romans 2:24, *“For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written.”*

All of this is a reminder to the church to examine itself and to remember that being God’s people is no excuse to ignore any portion of His Word. No wonder the admonition following Peter’s warning in chapter four ends with these words: *“Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator”* (1 Peter 4:19).

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WHAT HAVE I DONE?

Marvin L. Weir

Let us consider some questions we need to ask while we are alive and able to “rise up” and “return” to the Father.

God said to Jeremiah, *“Moreover thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the LORD; Shall they fall, and not arise? shall he turn away, and not return? Why then is this people of Jerusalem slidden back by a perpetual backsliding? they hold fast deceit, they refuse to return. I hearkened and heard, but they spake not aright: no man repented him of his wickedness, saying, **What have I done?** every one turned to his course, as the horse rusheth into the battle”* (Jer. 8:4-6).

Each person was busy chasing after his own dream and was determined to satisfy his own needs. People were holding fast to that which would destroy them — not that which would save them! No one seemed to care **what** they were doing as long as their personal whims and desires were satisfied.

God was listening, and He heard no one repent. His people were excelling at one thing — *“perpetual backsliding.”* The people were encouraged by Jeremiah to *“rise up”* from the deplorable depths to which they had sunk, but they refused to return to God and rushed to become even more entangled in sin. The **deceit** to which they held fast was in all probability their idolatry coupled with their refusal to believe their impending doom as foretold by God’s prophet Jeremiah.

Like Israel of old, many members of the Lord’s church today are pursuing and holding fast to material things while steadfastly refusing to *“seek first His kingdom and His righteousness”* (Matt. 6:33). It is as it was during Jeremiah’s day; no one believes their sin will condemn them, so they feel no need to repent!

In Luke 16 we are given a glimpse of life after death. Surely the rich man “in torments” thought to himself again and again, **“What have I done?”** While on the earth he had refused to listen to “Moses and the prophets,” and now there is no opportunity to “rise up” and “return.” Will people today continue to refuse to recognize the guilt of sin and refrain from asking,

“What have I done?”

Let us consider some questions we need to ask while we are alive and able to “rise up” and “return” to the Father.

What have I done with God?

Christ stressed that one’s first obligation is to *“love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind”* (Matt. 22:37). This does not leave room for divided affections. The Lord again said, *“No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon”* (Matt. 6:24).

Man was created and formed to glorify the Father (Isa. 43:7), but an ever-growing number of professing Christians firmly believe in self-glorification. They are convinced that the worship of the Lord’s church should revolve around their “felt needs.” So they incorrectly conclude that **what-ever** pleases them has to please God! Those who *“love the glory that is of men more than the glory that is of God”* (John 12:43) will never enter into the heavenly home.

Some members of the church worship their “jobs” and the opportunities to be even more successful. Other church members worship “recreation” and the opportunity to have fun. Some members worship “family” and are more committed to them than to the teaching of the Holy Scriptures. The Lord stated it clearly and correctly when He said to Satan’s temptations, *“Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve”* (Matt. 4:10).

Whatever it might be that seeks to drive a wedge between our love, devotion, service and worship of God should cause us to ask, “What have I done with God?”

What have I done with Christ?

Sin is the great separator between God and man (Isa. 59:2), and *“all have sinned”* (Rom. 3:23). Christ came into this world *“to seek and save that which was lost”* (Luke 19:10). His way is the

“only way” to the Father (John 14:6). Yet, many today try to get to the Father “their way” or the way of some man!

In the Christian age, Christ has “all” authority (Matt. 28:18). He is the head of His church which is His body (Eph. 1:22-23). It is true that only by God’s grace is salvation available to all men (Titus 2:11), but such does not eliminate the need for men to be obedient to Christ. The Scriptures teach that Christ *“became unto all them that obey him the author of eternal salvation”* (Heb. 5:9).

Some claim to be followers of Christ while reserving the right to reject certain of His commandments they do not desire to follow. They accept, as inspired only, those Scriptures they deem to be meaningful and valid. All of Christ’s words are valid and true (John 17:17). One cannot honor the Savior while refraining to abide by His will (John 14:15). Regardless of what one may say, he does not love God who refuses to keep His commandments (1 John 5:3). Today is the day to genuinely ask, “What have I done with the Christ?”

What have I done with the Lord’s church? Why is it that so many cannot see that if you accept the New Testament Christ you must also accept the New Testament church? The “give me Christ but not the church” belief comes from the mind of men — not the Word of God! One cannot successfully separate the head (Christ) from the body (His church). The apostle Paul could not have made it more clear when he said, *“and he put all things in subjection under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all”* (Eph. 1:22-23).

Look at those today who desire to “change” the body to suit their personal fancies while claiming to keep the same head! Christ is the builder of His church (Matt. 16:18). It was purchased, not with the sweat of man, but with the blood of the Savior (Acts

20:28). Where you find the original head, you will find the original body — you cannot have one without the other! An apostate body (congregation) is not worthy to wear the name of Christ even if it's in “name only.” Now is the time to ask, “What have I done with the Lord's church?”

What have I done with the Holy Scriptures? It is God's Word that should be a lamp unto the Christian's feet and a light unto his path (Psalm 119:105). A child of God should never accept the counsel of man as an infallible guide to Heaven. Neither does any man have the authority to authorize where God has not authorized. The inspired Word of God is sufficient and complete (2 Tim. 3:16-17), containing “*all things that pertain unto life and godliness*” (2 Peter 1:3).

The precious Gospel is God's “only” power unto salvation. One cannot be ashamed of the Gospel and have a legitimate hope of eternal life (Rom. 1:16). Many boast of their love for the Scriptures until the Scriptures condemn the way they are worshipping and/or living. These folks then readily recite their favorite Scripture, saying, “*Judge not, that ye be not judged*” (Matt. 7:1). However, a verse from the Master Himself they absolutely cannot recall says, “*Judge not according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment*” (John 7:24). The memory of those desiring to live as they please while demanding to be told they are going to Heaven is indeed an amazing thing!

One cannot “*continue in sin, that grace may abound*” (Rom. 6:1). Such is an abuse of God's grace and will condemn the one “living in sin” to an eternal hell (Col. 3:5-7). This is a truth that must be taught if one has *agape* love for the souls of others. This type of love will only do or say what is in another's best spiritual interest.

Some members of the Lord's church demand their “social drinking” be deemed acceptable while rejecting the Scripture's warnings against strong drink (Prov. 20:1; 23:31). The truth will never change that drunkenness is a work of the flesh and “*they who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God*” (Gal. 5:21).

Other members of the Lord's body want to “live in adultery” and be saved in eternity. They speak of their “right” to be married and stress that baptism washes away all sin. First, one has no

“rights” that are not given to him by God. Second, the act of baptism has never made an unholy thing holy or a wrong thing right. God grants the man and woman who has never been married the right to marry. They are to remain married to one another for life and such has been God's plan from the beginning (Gen. 1:27; 2:24). The general rule states that only the death of a spouse frees one to remarry in the Lord (Rom. 7:2-3; 1 Cor. 7:39). The one exception to the rule Christ gave is that one guilty of fornication forfeits his/her right and privilege of marriage. The innocent person who scripturally puts him/her away may remarry one eligible to be married (Matt. 19:3-12).

All who do not repent and give up the sin of adultery will be doomed to eternal torment (1 Cor. 6:9-10). An adulterous situation will always be adulterous and will never become a marriage sanctioned by God. Both the Christian and the non-Christian are amenable to God's laws.

It is now socially acceptable to dress as the world dresses — undresses would be more accurate. A child of God, however, is not to be “fashioned” (ASV) or “conformed” (KJV) to the ways of the world (Rom. 12:2). A lady who is a Christian has a special obligation not to dress in such a way as to contribute to the “*lust of the flesh*” (1 John 2:16). She should now be a “*new creature.*” The old worldly things are no longer a part of her life (2 Cor. 5:17). Since men are usually aroused much easier (sexually) by sight than women, it is imperative that women not dress in a manner as to contribute to a man looking on her with lust in his heart (Matt. 5:28; Titus 2:5; 1 Peter 3:2). Neither should a Christian man dress in a way to expose as much flesh as possible. Christians are not commanded to be followers of “Hollywood,” but of Christ (1 Peter 2:21). A member of the Lord's church must “*imitate not that which is evil, but that which is good*” (3 John 11).

Many mothers today train their daughters in the art of worldly and provocative dress and encourage them to dance to be socially acceptable. Fathers encourage their sons to drink, gamble and sow their wild oats. These parents then later claim to be amazed as to why their children are in trouble or no longer interested in the Lord's church! Although ignored, the princi-

ple is true, “*whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap*” (Gal. 6:7). It is now that one should ask, “What have I done with the Scriptures?”

What have I done with my Talents? Isn't it amazing that so many members of the Lord's church can be so successful and capable in the business world but unable to do a single thing for the local congregation? Why will so many never volunteer to teach a Bible class? Even those who are trained to teach (school teachers) many times refuse to teach Bible classes. Many men will not lead prayer, serve at the Lord's table, or help in any other capacity where help is needed. A congregation should not have to beg for servants in the kingdom! Christians have been purchased by God (Acts 20:28; 1 Cor. 6:19) and are thus obligated to serve. It is not right for a child of God to willingly use his time, money and tongue to glorify self while refusing to do the same to glorify God.

A Christian will lay up treasures in heaven because “*where thy treasure is, there will thy heart be also*” (Matt. 6:21). Let one sincerely ask in this life, “What have I done with my talents?”

What have I done with my Opportunities? It is a Christian's privilege to study the Bible, to be the “*salt of the earth*” and “*light of the world*” (Matt. 5:13-14), to speak “*the oracles of God*” (1 Peter 4:11) and to “*reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and doctrine*” (2 Tim. 4:2). Do we consider it a privilege to attempt to teach others the precious Gospel? Are we truly “*redeeming the time*” (Col. 4:5) we have been blessed with on this earth? What a tragedy to wait until judgment to ask, “What have I done with my opportunities?”

Today is the day to ask, “What have I done?” Make sure your citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20)!

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This lesson should make us search our soul every day! What are you doing with your responsibility toward GOD (Matt. 4:10)? Toward CHRIST (Acts 4:12)? Toward the CHURCH (Eph. 5:23)? Toward the BIBLE (Matt. 4:4)? Regarding your TALENTS (Matt. 25:14-30)? Regarding your OPPORTUNITIES (Gal. 6:10)?

TO BE WISE AS SERPENTS

Robert Ridgeway

Jesus also said that we need to be like serpents. Snakes? As Indiana Jones once said, “Snakes. Why did it have to be snakes?” I will tell you.

A *Tale of Two Cities* opens with the phrase, “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.” This is a theme of extreme contradiction and duality during the 1775 era French Revolution. Dickens highlights that the period was simultaneously hopeful and disparaging, wise and foolish.

The Bible gives us a duality that seems contradictory on the surface. “Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves” (Matt. 10:16). The easy part for us to understand is that we are sheep among wolves. Every ungodly element is waiting to devour us, so we must be ready to face that kind of opposition.

The rest is where we get lost in the text — we are to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. These two symbols seem to contend with each other, not work toward a good defense against wolves. We need to look at the deeper meaning.

Doves are known to be harmless. They are: docile, meek, lacking predatory instincts, not aggressive towards other birds. Jesus even said elsewhere, “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5). Meekness is often an unused word in our modern day — meaning submissive.

Some equate meekness with humility and for good reason. A meek person can also be humble, but these words aren’t quite synonyms. In fact, many times we get them confused in our approach to life. Humility is having or showing a modest estimate of one’s value or importance. To be humble is to not put yourself on a pedestal, but meekness is to submit to others. In this case, we submit to Christ.

Jesus also said that we need to be like serpents. Snakes? As Indiana Jones once said, “Snakes. Why did it have to be snakes?” I will tell you.

The phrase “wise as serpents” (Matt. 10:16) refers to being prudent, cautious, and discerning, rather than using the snake’s cunning for evil. They are considered wise for their ability to thrive in diverse environments — to adapt. This makes perfect sense when reading Paul: “For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more” (1 Cor. 9:19).

Paul goes on to explain how he moves closer to the views of one, so that he can bring them to Jesus (see also Acts 17), but is careful not to go too far and lose himself or his salvation in doing so. He is being wise as a serpent, cautious and discerning, adapting to his environment so he can bring souls to Christ.

We too must submit to the will of God and Christ as

we go into the world to preach the Gospel. As we do, we can be prudent, cautious, and discerning, using our ability to thrive in diverse environments, to adapt, to save all we can.

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As children of God, we should be:

- ABOUNDING in Christian Graces (2 Peter 1:5-11)
- ABSTAINING from every form of evil (1 Thess. 5:22)
- ACTIVE in the Lord’s Work (1 Cor. 15:58)
- ACCEPTING things authorized by the Word (Col. 3:17)
- ADVANCING the Cause of Christ (Mat. 28:18-20)
- ALERT to the Needs of Others (Gal. 6:2,10)

Jerry Joseph

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