



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, SPORTS, AND WORLDLINESS IN THE CHURCH

Ivie Powell

The Bible plainly declares: be not conformed to this world. Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.

I enjoy sports as much as anyone, especially hunting, and of course, football. I have never believed God was interested in sporting activities of any kind. For several years, God and sports have become center stage in America. Whether it be football, baseball, basketball, soccer, prize fights or cage fighting, participants will point upward and give the "sign of the cross" thanking God for the victory. A few years ago, a denominational preacher gave the invocation at the opening of NASCAR. During his "prayer" he said "We know you (God) are a big fan of NASCAR." Really? Many years prior to this, a preacher while giving the invocation at a football game, in effect, petitioned God as follows: "We've practiced hard for this game and we want You to help us win."

Reducing God to a "sports fan" and calling upon the High and Lofty One to "give us a win," trivializes The Almighty and betrays a lack of respect and honor that is due Him! Furthermore, such blasphemous statements are an attack upon the very nature of God! The fact is, God could care less about sports! One British newspaper published a letter to the editor entitled: "Leave me out of your petty games, Love, God." While I certainly do not agree with making a statement as if it came directly from the Almighty, the point is well taken! While Paul made reference to various sporting activities, such as running a

race and receiving a prize (cf. 1 Cor. 9:24-26), bodily exercise (1 Tim. 4:8) or fighting a good fight (2 Tim. 4:7), it was always in reference to spiritual matters!

The craze for worldly activities has brought about building gymnasiums by many "churches" of Christ. Exercise rooms and other worldly activities are offered to meet the needs of the "whole man." Many members of the church are so in tune with the world that they will move the Sunday evening service to accommodate a Super Bowl party! That which is conspicuously absent by proponents of such activities is biblical authority (Col. 3:17)! Brethren need to be reminded that recreation and entertainment is not a work of the church; but rather, the work of the home!

While it is not considered a "sport," winners of the "Miss America" contest are paraded as role models in many publications. In 2010, *The Christian Chronicle* (a vehicle promoting the ungodly "unity in diversity" movement among us) featured on its front page a member of the Lord's church that won the "Miss America" contest. Not one word was written condemning immodesty (1 Tim. 2:9)! Many members of the church are so in tune with the world that one congregation had a crowning of the King and Queen at their home coming! "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump" (1 Cor. 5:6)! In light of these and other occurrences, how can

any deny that worldliness in the Lord's church is plunging many down the path to eternal damnation!

The Bible plainly declares: "*be not conformed to this world*" (Rom. 12:1). How does God view worldly Christians and congregations? James pointedly answers that question: "*Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God*" (James 4:4). Children of God are instructed "*to keep himself unspotted from the world*" (James 1:27). Therefore, when a congregation becomes worldly in its outlook and practice, they are an enemy of God! All of the shouting, "Oh, how I love Jesus," and "look at our good works," to the contrary! Furthermore, when elders and preachers lead congregations to conform to the world, unless they repent, they will soon become, "*...lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God. Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away*" (2 Tim. 3:4-5).

Every generation of the Lord's church is in danger of being engulfed and swept away, thus, the need to constantly remind brethren to, "*Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against*

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Editorial...

FINDING GRACE TO HELP #2

Garland M. Robinson

Hebrews 4:16, “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”

The prophet Jeremiah serves as an example of receiving God’s grace and help in time of need. It often appeared as though he was all alone in doing God’s work. His preaching was not appreciated. He was the object of sneers, mockings and ridicule. He once grew weary enough that he thought, “Oh that I had in the wilderness a lodging place of wayfaring men; that I might leave my people, and go from them! for they [be] all adulterers, an assembly of treacherous men” (Jer. 9:2). Have you ever felt like that? Wishing you could go away somewhere and just blend in with the crowd? Not having to bear the responsibility, just be a “nobody?” Jeremiah thought it would be nice to go to some backwoods place (where no one knew him) and run a motel. But, he had a job to do — responsibility to bear. He could not run away from God and the burden of the souls of men.

On another similar occasion, in a moment of great discouragement, Jeremiah thought he just might quit preaching — manage that motel in the wilderness. He penned these words in Jeremiah 20:7-13: “...I am in derision daily, every one mocketh me. For since I spake, I cried out, I cried violence and spoil; because the word of the LORD was made a reproach unto me, and a derision, daily. Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But [his word] was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not [stay]. For I heard the defaming of many, fear on every side. Report, [say they], and we will report it. All my familiars watched for my halting, [saying], Peradventure he will be enticed, and we shall prevail against him, and we shall take our revenge on him. But the LORD [is] with me as a mighty

terrible one: therefore my persecutors shall stumble, and they shall not prevail: they shall be greatly ashamed; for they shall not prosper: [their] everlasting confusion shall never be forgotten. But, O LORD of hosts, that triest the righteous, [and] seest the reins and the heart, let me see thy vengeance on them: for unto thee have I opened my cause. Sing unto the LORD, praise ye the LORD: for he hath delivered the soul of the poor from the hand of evil-doers.” He continued with bemoaning the day of his birth. “Cursed [be] the day wherein I was born: let not the day wherein my mother bare me be blessed. Cursed [be] the man who brought tidings to my father, saying, A man child is born unto thee; making him very glad.”

Back in chapter 8 of his book, Jeremiah asked, “[Is there] no balm in Gilead; [is there] no physician there...” (v.22). Of course there was (and there still is)! God loved Israel with a love beyond their comprehension, but He was not going to help when the people refused to follow the way of righteousness. They were carried away into captivity in Babylon and remained there for 70 years before being restored to the land of Canaan.

Stubborn man refuses to see the love of God and seek His help. It reminds me of a dog that is put on a leash for the first time. You try to lead that dog along and he will pull, twist, tug, bite, toss, roll and refuse in every way to be restrained. It’s a tug of war as you drag him along with him on “all fours” resisting every inch. You’re not trying to hurt him or punish him. You’re teaching him to be led. All he has to do is quit fighting and tugging and gently walk along beside you. Things would be so easy if he would do that. But no, he will fight and pull every step of the way. You’re not the one pulling, tugging, yanking and giving him a hard time. You’re not seeing how difficult you can make it for him. He’s the one resisting and making it hard on himself. He’ll get mad at you

thinking you’re the one hurting him. But that is not the case. Once he figures out he don’t have to pull and fight, it’s a simple matter for him to stroll along and enjoy the walk.

Children are often the same way. When they resist the rules of the home and the right ways of the Lord, they make the way hard on themselves by their own rebellion. They will pull and tug, fuss and quarrel and try your patience. But when they learn to obey their parents and be patient, they’ll see how much more pleasant their life can be. They’ll get to do a lot of things if they will only cooperate and quit tugging on their leash. It’s a lesson that must be learned — the sooner the better. It’s a lesson they will some day teach their own children as well.

While Saul was king of Israel, he went through a period in his life where he felt threatened by David. He was paranoid thinking David wanted his throne and would take it from him by force. But that was certainly not the case. David had several chances to kill Saul, was even encouraged by his men to do so, but David refused to kill the Lord’s anointed (cf. 1 Sam. 24). During this time, David was constantly on the run for this life because of Saul’s pursuit. All the while, the Lord was on his side. He had been anointed by Samuel to be the future king of Israel (1 Sam. 16:13) but he was not about to kill Saul to obtain it.

Later in David’s life, his own son Absalom won the hearts of the people and tried to seize the throne. David once again had to flee the city and hide wherever he could. He was a hunted man. His own son would have killed him in a heart-beat if he could. However, David had given orders to his commanders not to harm Absalom when they found him. But they did not listen. At their first opportunity they killed him. When David received the news, the Bible says David “was much moved...and wept; and as he went, thus he said, O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son” (2 Sam. 18:33)!

Psalms 13 is thought to have been written at such a time when David was in great distress. “How long wilt thou forget me, O LORD? for ever? how long wilt thou hide thy face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, [having] sorrow in my heart

daily? how long shall mine enemy be exalted over me? Consider [and] hear me, O LORD my God: lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the [sleep of] death; Lest mine enemy say, I have prevailed against him; [and] those that trouble me rejoice when I am moved. But I have trusted in thy mercy; my heart shall rejoice in thy salvation. I will sing unto the LORD, because he hath dealt bountifully with me.

At times of despair when David did not know what would happen. When he wondered what he would do and whether he would live through it, he still trusted in God's mercy. His heart rejoiced in his salvation. He would sing unto the Lord because of his bountiful blessings. Should we not do the same? We are no different than David. We serve the same God and our Lord is the same yesterday, today

and forever (cf. Heb. 13:8). If he helped David, he will help us too.

Another of the best known and loved sections of Scripture in all the Bible is the 23rd Psalm. It certainly speaks of times when David's life was in great peril, yet it reveals a calm and peacefulness that can only be known and experienced by a child of God. *"The LORD [is] my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou [art] with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely*

goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever" (Psalm 23).

In times of great anxiety and burden, there was serenity knowing Jehovah God was his keeper and protector. David had the same frame of mind as Job who said, *"Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: but I will maintain mine own ways before him"* (Job 13:15).

Is this not an example of God's care for his children? David trusted in God's mercy and rejoiced in his salvation. It brought comfort to him in his darkest hour. We too can take great comfort in our Lord in spite of all the troubles of life. There's a better day coming. There's a better time ahead, if not in this life, certainly in the life to come.

CHRISTIANITY AND ISLAM #4: DOCTRINE ABOUT JESUS

Adam Good

How can anyone believe that the God of the Bible and Islam's god (Allah) are the same being? One proclaims Jesus to be His beloved Son while the other denies that he even has a son.

Many Christians are surprised to learn that Jesus is referenced dozens of times in the *Qur'an*. However, Christianity and Islam hold irreconcilable positions concerning His identity and mission. Each religion proclaims the other's doctrine concerning Jesus to be the gravest of blasphemies. Muhammad's Allah is clearly distinguished from the God of the Bible by what is taught in his name concerning Jesus. They cannot possibly be the same deity. Consequently, there can be no agreement between faithful Christians and Muslims.

Christianity is built upon the deity of Jesus the Christ. That Jesus is both the "Son of God" and "God incarnate" is set forth clearly in Scripture. When the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary, he told her that the *"holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God"* (Luke 1:35).

Matthew 16:16-17 reads: *"...Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed [it] unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven."* The apostle John opened his account of the Gospel: *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. ... And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth"* (John 1:1-2,14). The Hebrew writer further explained how God *"Hath... spoken unto us by [his] Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of [his] glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of*

his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Heb. 1:2-3). This is why Jesus taught, *"he that hath seen me hath seen the Father"* (John 14:9). Paul wrote that in Christ *"...dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily"* (Col. 2:9). As John brought his Gospel to a close, he explained that the miracles he had recounted were *"...written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name"* (John 20:31).

The Jewish leadership understood Jesus' claims. *"Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he...said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God"* (John 5:18). Jesus responded *"...all [men] should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth*

not the Father which hath sent him” (John 5:23). On another occasion, the Jews prepared to stone Jesus for teaching “*I and My Father are One.*” They accused him of “*blasphemy...because...thou, being a man, makest thyself God*” (John 10:29-33). During His trial before the Sanhedrin, the high priest demanded of Jesus “*...I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God.*” Jesus affirmed “It is as you said” (Matt. 26:63-64). When Jesus appeared before Pilate, the Roman governor found “no fault in Him.” Determined to see Him executed, the Jewish leaders argued, “*...We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God*” (John 19:7).

These quotations only barely begin to touch upon the Bible’s teaching that Jesus is the only begotten Son of God and co-equal with the Father. The *Qur’an* vehemently denies this foundational truth. “It befits not (the Majesty) of Allah that He should beget a son” (Surah 19:35). “Exalted is the Majesty of our Lord [Allah]: He has taken neither a wife nor a son” (Surah 72:3). Allah “begetteth not” (Surah 112:3). Muhammad did not understand the concept of Jesus being the Son of God. He conceived of it in human terms, thinking that Christians believed that God had taken a human female as His consort and that Jesus was their biological offspring. This is a pagan understanding common in ancient mythology (i.e. Zeus and Hercules).

Over and over, the *Qur’an* rails against the Sonship of Jesus. Understand that Muhammad considered Allah to be the God of the Bible. This is patently false, but recognizing his belief is essential to grasping what the *Qur’an* teaches about Jesus. “O People of the Book [Jews and Christians]! Come to common terms as between us and you: That we worship none but Allah. That we associate no partners with him; that we erect not, from among ourselves, Lords and patrons other than Allah” (Surah 3:64). Surah 4:171 declares: “O People of the Book! Do not exaggerate in your religion nor utter aught concerning Allah save the truth. The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only a messenger of Allah, and His word which He conveyed unto Mary, and a spirit from Him. So believe in Allah and His mes-

sengers, and say not ‘Three’ — Cease! (it is) better for you! — Allah is only One Allah. Far is it removed from His Transcendent Majesty that He should have a son.”

It is “blasphemy” to say “that Allah is Christ the son of Mary” according to Surah 5:17. Hell is the final destination of those who utter such things (Surah 5:72). Surah 10:68-70 is explicit on these two points: “They say: ‘(Allah) hath begotten a son!’ ... No warrant have ye for this! say ye about Allah what ye know not? Say: ‘Those who invent a lie against Allah will never prosper.’ A little enjoyment in this world! and then, to Us will be their return, then shall We make them taste the severest penalty for their blasphemies.” To teach that Jesus is the Son of God is to declare “a thing most monstrous. At it the skies are ready to burst, the earth to split asunder, and the mountain to fall down in utter ruin, that they should invoke a son for (Allah) Most Gracious. For it is not consonant with the majesty of (Allah) Most Gracious that He should beget a Son” (Surah 19:88-92).

The *Qur’an* teaches that one of its purposes is to “warn those who say, ‘Allah hath begotten a son:’ no knowledge have they of such a thing, nor had their fathers. It is a grievous thing that issues from their mouths as a saying what they say is nothing but falsehood” (Surah 18:4-5).

The *Qur’an* contradicts other basic New Testament teachings. Surah 4:157-159 denies the death, burial and resurrection of Christ: “That they said, ‘We killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary, the Messenger of Allah,’ but they killed him not, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them, and those who differ therein are full of doubts, with no (certain) knowledge, but only conjecture to follow, for of a surety they killed him not: Nay, Allah raised him up unto Himself... And there is none of the People of the Book [Jews and Christians] but must believe in him before his death; and on the Day of Judgment he will be a witness against them.” Paul wrote that “the resurrection from the dead” “declared” Jesus “to be the Son of God with power” (Rom. 1:4). If the resurrection never happened “then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen,” Paul explained, then “our preaching is empty

and your faith is also empty” (1 Cor. 15:14).

The *Hadith* denies Jesus’ role as the mediator between God and man (cf. 1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 7:25). Muhammad taught that on the Day of Judgment the believers would look for someone to intercede on their behalf with Allah. They approached Adam who sent them to Noah who referred them to Abraham who advised them to ask Moses who sent them on to Jesus. Muhammad put these words into Jesus’ mouth: “I am not fit for this undertaking, but you’d better go to Muhammad whose sins of the past and future had been forgiven (by Allah)” (Bukhari 7410). The *Hadith* also condemns anyone who believes that Jesus is Lord (Bukhari 5285). Romans 10:9 teaches that a person must “confess...Jesus as Lord” in order to be saved. Islam views the Bible plan of salvation as blasphemy against Allah.

How can anyone believe that the God of the Bible and Islam’s god (Allah) are the same being? One proclaims Jesus to be His beloved Son while the other denies that he even has a son. True Christianity and Islam are at an impasse. Islam holds Christianity to be a blasphemous religion founded on monstrous lies. Anyone who becomes a Christian, professing Jesus as Lord, is destined to Hell. Islam would view the beloved John 3:16 as the greatest of blasphemies instead of a wonderful summation of the grace of God found in Jesus.

It is fitting that the apostle John, whose account of the Gospel proclaims the deity of Christ, wrote, “*Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son. Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: [but] he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also*” (1 John 2:22-23). Furthermore, John explained, “*If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater: for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son. He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son*” (1 John 5:9-10).

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flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high [places]. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand (Eph. 6:11-13).

Love for the world and the things of the world have always been one of Satan's weapons to draw away disciples of Christ. Satan (who is the "god of this world") is ever working to blind the minds of the Lord's people. When

this takes place, *"the light of the glorious gospel of Christ"* (2 Cor. 4:4) will not only be hidden, if not careful, it will be extinguished!

That children of God and even congregations of the Lord's church can go back, return or fall from grace is a constant reminder throughout the Bible (Gal. 5:4; 2 Tim. 2:18; 1 Tim. 1:19; 1 Tim. 4:1; Heb. 3:12-4:1; Heb. 6:4-8). Of course, there are the five churches of Asia that were to repent or else (Rev. 2-3)!

John warns the Lord's people to, *"Love not the world, neither the things [that are] in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that [is] in the world,*

the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever" (1 John 2:15-17). We are further reminded to *"Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth"* (Col. 3:2).

It is time for brethren to once again, *"Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression"* (Isa. 58:1)! A refusal means we will not be *"pure from the blood of all men"* (Acts 20:26)!

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THE REALITY OF DEATH

Regardless of the culture in which one lives it is a universal fact that the concept of a human death is not one that brings excitement to our minds. There are those who try to avoid speaking about death, because to them, such a thought is simply too morbid. Others refuse to talk concerning death because they are afraid discussing it will bring bad luck.

Why do humans die? In Romans 5:12, it is written *"...by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned."* It was "sin" that caused death to come into the world — the sin of Eve and Adam. Because of their violation of God's will, God cast man out of the Garden of Eden, in His own words, *"lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever"* (Gen. 3:22). Today, you and I do not have access to the tree of life on earth, so we die.

Generally, people are living longer today than people of recent generations did. Improved medical practices, discovered cures for some diseases, improved health education, and improved dietary choices are some of the factors which have contributed to man's longevity. Yet, despite our efforts to maintain our fitness and prolong our exit from this world, we will die one day. Death shows no partiality. It comes to the highly educated and less educated, to the poor and to the rich, to the ungodly and to the godly. Just before his death, King David told his son, *"I go the*

way of all the earth" (1 Kings 2:2) — a clear reference to the universality of death.

It is an unavoidable truth that *"it is appointed unto men once to die"* (Heb. 9:27). Physical death is part of the human experience. There have been two exceptions to this rule in the past, the prophets Enoch and Elijah did not die. When Jesus returns, those still alive at that time will not pass through physical death, but all will be changed (1 Cor. 15:51).

Death is a separation. It is a fact that *"the body without the spirit is dead"* (James 2:26), so at death, the spirit of a person is separated from (that is, no longer in) the physical body. Thus, death is the closing chapter of one phase of our existence — the earthly stage. However, there is an eternal aspect of our being, as each human has a spirit that will never pass through death or go out of existence. *"Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it"* (Eccl. 12:7).

Some mistakenly assume that their death will come "much later" rather than sooner. The young often give no thought to death, or if death does enter their mind, they tell themselves that they will not have to face such an unpleasant matter for many years. The truth is, life is like a vapor that appears for a little while then vanishes away (James 4:14). Many say, "But I should still have a lot of good years left." There is no guarantee of that is there? Hear

these sobering words: *"Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth"* (Prov. 27:1). The undeniable truth is, none of us knows how long we will live on the earth. Death sometimes comes to the young as well as to the healthy, does it not?

We understand that on the human side of things, once death has occurred, it is good for those who are grieving over a person's passing to have what we call "closure." After Sarah's demise, Abraham declared a desire to *"bury my dead out of my sight"* (Gen. 23:4). Many take great care to have their funerals well planned. It is a serious folly, though, for a person to give more thought in preparing for their funeral/memorial service than for their death. Why is that? Because after we die, we will face judgment (Heb. 9:27). Being in the right relationship with the Lord so we will be ready for judgment is of far greater importance than planning in advance for a wake or funeral arrangements.

Great multitudes of people are terrified by the thought of dying. Why is that? For many, it is because they are unsure of what lies on the other side of death. The Bible teaches that Jesus came to release men from the bondage of fearing death (Heb. 2:14). The great news is, by God's grace Jesus tasted death for you, me, and every other sinner (Heb. 2:9). Through Jesus' death, we can have life! Via the physical death of the Redeemer, all can have spiritual life! For the saved, death is a passage into a wonderful eternity. Praise God for it and pass on the good news!

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POSTMODERN THINKING #4 TOLERANCE

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Tolerance (as is seen today) has eliminated all debate of the issues. Everyone is supposed to go along to get along without anything being said. However, the so-called “tolerant” cannot tolerate the intolerant. They are hypocrites!

This series of articles is examining a system of thought that has invaded the United States and the world. It is referred to as postmodernism or postmodern thought. There are many elements of this system of thought that have manifested themselves in our society. Many people see things that are happening and are troubled by them. This series is designed to give some understanding of what is happening in our nation and in the church of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Postmodernism has five foundational elements. We have examined two of them: *Pluralism* (February) and *Relativism* (March). In this article, we will be looking at the third pillar. It is called *Tolerance*. Tolerance is defined as: “an interest in and concern for ideas, opinions, and practices that differ from one’s own.” Because we live in a pluralistic society, some tolerance is needed by all. There is a galaxy of ideas, opinions, and practices that differ widely from person to person, culture to culture, and group to group in our nation. If we did not have respect and tolerance for these differing views, we would be at war constantly.

The idea of tolerance, however, has changed dramatically in recent times. It used to be acceptable to converse and debate, sometimes vigorously, about the differences that exist between individuals. Each person could say what needed to be said about another’s beliefs. Weaknesses could be exposed. Errors could be pointed out. Contradictions could be documented. Once the debate was over, both sides would still tolerate each other. But tolerance (as is seen today) has eliminated all debate of the issues. Everyone is supposed to go along to get along without anything being said. We have opposing view-

points, but we cannot discuss them. If anyone speaks out against another, he is viewed as being intolerant, mean, and unloving. He is viewed as a person who causes division. It appears that some do not understand the definition of unity. Unity comes through agreement and likemindedness. The prophet of old asked: “*Can two walk together, except they be agreed*” (Amos 3:3)? Just because people are not allowed to discuss their differences does not mean that people are united. Unity comes from having the “same mind” and the “same judgment” (cf. 1 Cor. 1:10).

If a person believes the Word of God contains absolute truth, he is put in a dilemma when things surface that oppose the truth. The apostle Paul said that God’s children must be set for the “*defense of the Gospel*” (Phil. 1:17). We cannot allow error to prevail over truth. We cannot allow immorality to triumph over holy living. Because truth exists, Christians are obligated to oppose falsehood. The attitude of the psalmist must permeate the attitude of God’s people today. He wrote: “*Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way*” (Psa. 119:104).

Under today’s practice, any form of opposition to another is believed to be intolerant, unloving, unkind, mean, and divisive. Let’s look at a couple of illustrations.

The Bible plainly condemns the **LGTBQ** lifestyles (Lesbian, Gay, Transgender, Bisexual, Queer). The actions of this “community” involve fornication and uncleanness. Their sexual acts are works of the flesh that will keep one out of the kingdom of God (Gal. 5:19-21). Romans 1:26-27 shows that homosexual acts involve “vile affections” and that they oppose the natural use of both men and women. Christians cannot tolerate

these actions to the point of never saying anything. They must speak out against them. If they do not, these actions will invade our society like a cancer. But, when we do, we will be accused of being intolerant. Condemnation is not tolerated in a tolerant society. Note that! The “tolerant” cannot tolerate the intolerant.

Another example of something Christians cannot tolerate is the religion of **Islam**. This religion is in direct opposition to Christianity. It does not believe that Jesus is divine. It denies the crucifixion and resurrection of the Christ. It does not believe that Jesus is God’s final prophet to humanity. It does not believe the Bible is the infallible Word of God. Thus, Christians must stand in opposition to it. Again, when we do, our tolerant society will label us as Islamophobics. They will call us haters. Many in our society believe that Islam should be allowed to exist without anyone saying anything in opposition to them.

As we study the Bible (God’s holy inspired word), do we see a Christ who was tolerant of anything and everything? Absolutely not! In John four, Jesus came into contact with a woman of Samaria. Their conversation involved several topics. As they spoke, the woman was convinced that Jesus was a prophet. This led her to bring up a very controversial topic of that time. “*The woman said unto him, Sir, I perceive thou art a prophet. Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship*” (John 4:19-20). The woman brought up two conflicting views about the place of worship. She wanted to know what Jesus’ thoughts were on the subject. If Jesus had been tolerant, He would have said: “Both groups believe in God. Both groups are sincere. Both are trying to worship the same God.

Both have some similarities. Thus, we need to be tolerant and accept both.” Or, He could have said: “I have my beliefs and you have your beliefs. Let’s not argue about them. Let’s just tolerate and love each other.” This, however, was not the response of our Lord. *“Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet in Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews”* (John 4:21-22). The Samaritans were worshipping incorrectly and

Jesus told the woman that. He plainly declared that salvation is of the Jews. Friends, Jesus was not tolerant when it came to the defense of the truth. If Jesus were living today, He would be accused of being intolerant, unloving, and very mean.

Tolerance is a foundational element of our society. It has caused us to be very weak. It has enabled all kinds of evil ideologies and behaviors to leaven our society. It has filled the hearts of God’s people with fear. It has brought persecution to those who refuse to tolerate false doctrine and un-

godly living.

Our tolerant society will tolerate anything and everyone except those who do not believe as they do. They are not tolerant of those who differ with them — those whom they think are intolerant. They are not tolerant of the creator’s one and only absolute and infallible standard of authority, God’s holy Word, the Bible. Remember, only the absolute truth can make you free (John 8:31-32).

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THE JUDGMENT DAY

Johnny Ramsey (Deceased)

When we stand before God, the judge of all (Heb. 12:23), what will our sentence be? When life’s journey shall have ended, will we regret our poor decisions that caused us to be lost (Gal. 6:7)? Or, shall we rejoice to know that our sojourn was meaningful (1 John 4:17)? “Only one life, it will soon be past. Only what is done for Christ will last.” How very true those sentiments! When the clock of life no longer ticks because eternity has been ushered in, what will our destiny hold? What kind of day will judgment disclose?

It Will Be A Day Of Reckoning. Will it be reward or remorse when we stand before our Maker? Will there be a handwriting on the wall of our record that proclaims our doom (Daniel 5)? Shall we reap the whirlwind of shameful activity (Hosea 8:7) or the joy of our salvation? When God’s “book of remembrance” is opened (Malachi 3), what will be the contents? Can we say what Nehemiah did? *“Remember me, O my God, for good”* (Neh. 13:31).

It Will Be A Day Of Rest. Yes, rest from a wicked world and a sinful environment awaits the faithful child of God (Heb. 4:9). In Revelation 21:3-5 we see the fruition of godliness in a realm that knows no sickness, sadness nor separation. Earthly corruption never enters, and the toils of life are gone (2 Cor. 5:1). Fleshly lusts are forsaken (1 Peter 2:11), and even death shall have been turned into victory! We will be glad we obeyed — *“Redeeming the time because the days are evil”* (Eph. 5:16).

It Will Be A Day Of Reunion. Christ will take us to be with him (John 14:3). According to Matthew 8, Abraham and Isaac and Jacob will be there. David spoke of his dead son in 2 Samuel 12:23, “I shall go to him.” Loved ones will be together again! I believe Hebrews 12:23 gives us a hint of the same. What joy it will be to see the redeemed of all the ages. There has never been a family reunion like that one will be!

It Will Be A Day Of Revelation. The one who knows us as we really are, and not as we pretend to be, will reveal our eternal destiny (Rom. 2:16). The sins we were forgiven of by the Redeemer shall not be remembered (Heb. 8:12; Psa. 32:1; 1 John 1:7), for which we should praise God. But, hypocrisies and insincerities we tried to hide will be exposed, and those things we knew we should have done will haunt us — *“To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin”* (James 4:17).

We are given this life to prepare for eternity, but many pervert this purpose and waste their moments upon earth. On that notable day, the infidel will confess the Lord (Phil. 2:9-11), and the disobedient will try to hide from the wrath of the Almighty (Rev. 6:12). May we be wise enough now to search our ways and return to the Lord (Lamentations 3:40).

Let us use our days wisely: *“So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom”* (Psa. 90:12). And let us never *“follow a multitude to do evil”* (Exodus 23:2). Heaven is too precious to miss!

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[EDITOR'S NOTE: While denominations have various and sundry teachings, the church of Christ does not have any such thing. We do not teach 'church of Christ doctrine' because no such thing exists. Members of the church of Christ teach the Holy Scriptures — the Bible. It is not accurate to say 'the church of Christ teaches...'. The church of Christ does not teach its own set of rules and dogmas. It has none that have been decided upon by man. Man did not institute the church, the Lord did. No man or group of men decided to believe 'this or that' and/or not to believe 'this or that.' We simply teach what the Bible teaches without adding anything to it nor subtracting anything from it. Second Timothy 2:15 calls it "rightly dividing the word." We do not teach 'church of christ doctrine.' We teach Bible doctrine. The Bible alone governs the divine institution known as the church of Christ. As a result, we are not 'Church of Christ's'. We are simply members of the church of Christ (Rom. 16:16). We have no creed but the Bible. We follow no man from the past or present. Every congregation of the church of Christ is autonomous and answers only the Lord God in heaven above. Our headquarters is in heaven (Phil. 3:20), not on earth.]

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