

There are many zealous religious persons in the “Christian world” today. Yet, sadly, many are not preaching Christ and Him crucified, 1Corinthians 1:23. Some promise liberty from poverty both temporal and spiritual. Yet they themselves are servants, servants of corruption. Some unsaved, well meaning perhaps, are making a career of helping the unfortunate, but misleading them regarding their eternal destiny. Some promote liberty to realize one’s full potential. Some preach “do what you please so that grace may abound,” Romans 6:1. Far be the thought. Some peddle the word of God as a commodity to enrich themselves or to gain a following, 2Corinthians 2:17, (NASV NKJ, JND). But Jesus says:

John 8:31 Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; 32 And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

Some promise wealth if the listener will just send them money. The victims bring loss upon themselves through wanton lust for gain.

1Timothy 6:6 Godliness with contentment is great gain... 8 Be content with such things as ye have.

Some promise healing if the listener will just send them money. Their victims only bring themselves greater pain through their impatience with the chastening hand of God. Some souls get religion, seeking to reform themselves perhaps after some terrible experience that had befallen them. Learning about the Lord Jesus, as a result may actually begin to live cleaner lives, perhaps even using Him as their example. But they have barely escaped from those who live in error only to be tempted away by another smiling deceiver drawing them back into their old crowd and old ways.

But even born again believers can’t deliver a godly life through personal strength and resolve. Every true born again believer experiences what Paul experienced when he attempted to live godly in his own strength unless he reads and heeds Romans chapters 7 and 8. Chapter 7 graphically documents this experience and the desperate cry of frustration for deliverance from one’s own indwelling sin. Chapter 8 gives the solution. Those who are not born again, but have become religious for what ever reason, will experience the futility of an unregenerate soul trying to adhere to some prescribed religious principles, avoiding evil deeds and doing good. But if they do not cast themselves upon the Lord for saving grace, confessing their incurable sinfulness, they remain in their sins. Unable to sustain their ambitious resolve to be faithful to their conscience or the religion they have selected they may apostatize, abandoning it all. Unable to restrain the flesh that is in them, much less overcome the bad habits deeply ingrained by past misdeeds, they fall into a worse state than before. They

had been temporarily changed in outward appearances but they remained unsaved, unchanged, unclean inside. Mere reformation falls short. Instead of being born again and becoming a **sheep** under the tender protective care of the Good Shepherd they remain, with unrenewed hearts, in their natural in-born sinful condition. They easily return to their old ways like a washed **sow** finding cooling relief from the heat (threat of coming judgement) and protection from pests (pesky reminders from a defiled and hardening conscience) by wallowing in the mud (self pity). They first rejected the sinful uncleanness in which they had been indulging themselves, like **dogs** who carelessly eat anything they find no matter how awful it smells and later vomit it up. Yet when they find nothing better to indulge in, they return to what they rejected. It smells even worse, but they gobble it down again. Things ordinarily repulsive to upright persons easily pass the “smell test” of a perverted person whose conscience is seared.

Timothy 4:1 Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; 2 Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron;

Drugs, alcohol, gambling, anger, sexual immorality, shoplifting, compulsive behaviors of all kinds, self-destructive adventurism, whatever vice or habit that had captured them before calls them back. See Romans 1:29-32; 1Corinthians 6:9-10; Galatians 5:19-21.

Peter says they would have been **better off** never having the religious experience they had. Why? For one thing they have now become disillusioned about religion and God. They attribute **their failure** to something lacking in God rather than rightly blaming their own sinful nature and the deceptive worldly religion that originally captivated them by its appeal to their lusts. They have less chance of being eternally saved now than before. Satan has duped another soul through his human agents (dupes themselves). They are members of any number of religious systems, thriving under the god of this world.

2Corinthians 4:4 In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.

Religions appeal to man’s flesh and pride. Paul calls these systematized evil.

Ephesians 4:13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: 14 That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;

The Corinthians were drawn away by entertaining spiritual manifestations, 1Corinthians 14. Some are attracted by inspiring rituals, others by a challenging list of daunting commandments by which to prove themselves.

1Timothy 4:3 Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. 4 For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: 5 For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.

Each of these worldly forms of religious service gratify the flesh. But the truly born again believer can discern this by the Spirit dwelling in him and be delivered by His power from their alluring call. Peter has, by the Spirit, given the alert here in writing which cannot be ignored. Don't do anything or allow anything that will distract a concerned seeking soul from the only way of salvation, Christ crucified. Don't do anything that will quench the Spirit or add man's arrangements or traditions to Spirit led worship, individual or collective.

The Lord says Judas would have been **better off** if he had never been born, Matthew 26:24. Didn't Judas experience a greater privilege than perhaps any other man who perished in his sins? He was personally befriended and disciplined by the Son of God and lived and walked by Him, enjoying His favor for three years. At the end He was offered the choicest morsel of the supper. Dare anyone say God didn't give him a fair chance? Did anyone harden his heart more against such repeated appeals of mercy and grace? Couldn't God override such a stubborn will? He could! And has! After all, no one would be saved if He didn't! Not me! Not you! Why then does God allow certain people to be born and live adult lives only to die in their sins, eternally lost? Paul tells us God endured Pharaoh's wicked behavior in order to demonstrate to the world that Jehovah is in charge, Romans 9:14-22. Simply put, **God is Sovereign** and has the right and power to do what He pleases. He is

righteous in all, Genesis 18:25. And more importantly, God is love! Always! Whatever life span He allows one to continue on unsaved reflects His mercy and is **longsuffering** to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance, 2Peter 3:9. What if God by His **goodness** seeks to lead men to repentance, Romans 2:4? Men enjoy His goodness and mercies daily, Acts 14:17, yet refuse to be thankful, Romans 1:21, much less repent. What if He has given the Son of His love to save sinners, John 3:16; Colossians 1:13? What if He persists seeking to save, Luke 19:10? Persists, long after any human patience would be exhausted in frustration, offering this or that poor lost soul opportunity after opportunity to bow, kneel, repent and accept His saving grace? What if He offers this mercy to every lost soul? Was He unrighteous to send Pharaoh to his death and eternal punishment after relenting and removing a plague ten times? He gave him more than ten opportunities to repent, opportunities squandered by the prideful, unbreakable heart that only hardened when given mercy. Didn't God know the ultimate outcome? Yet can anyone say He didn't give Pharaoh a fair chance? Did God enjoy enduring Pharaoh's rebellion and multiple refusals to repent? No. Does God enjoy offering multiple opportunities displaying His mercy and grace to all? Yes. *A c t s 17:30 God ...commandeth all men every where to repent.* See Acts 17:24-31. Is He glorified by this attitude? Do men and angels come to know His character better because of His longsuffering? Do they not detect glimmers of what is behind His stern, yet merciful, treatment of Pharaoh? Love? Isn't He glorious? Awesome, glorious LOVE. Yet people, like sows, return content to their wallow and like dogs return to their vomit, LOST.

By Ron Canner, June 8, 2005