

DO ALL ROADS

LEAD TO HEAVEN?



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There are some things plainly taught in the word of God that are difficult to explain to our friends because their minds are blinded by their own thoughts, wishes, hopes, and fears concerning others. Some can hardly see what the Bible teaches on a given subject because they are thinking of the beliefs or practices of their relatives and friends, living or dead. We should all seek the truth regardless of what others may have thought or done, and having learned we should obey as quickly as did Saul of Tarsus, the Philippian jailer, Cornelius, or the three thousand on Pentecost. They did not wait to consult some living friend or to consider the belief of some dead relative. When they were sure of God's will, they accepted without hesitation. We all need to be sure we are right in God's sight and then go ahead. Each is judged as an individual and should seek first the kingdom and righteousness of God.

People do not reach heaven accidentally, nor by some way contrary to the Lord's will. We should all give diligence to make our calling and election sure or none will enter in through the gate into the city. (2 Peter 1:5-11.) The idea that one can shut his eyes and select some religion by chance and certainly be right is a foolish idea. It is possible to be wrong in religion, and it is very serious to be wrong in the sight of God. "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but *he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven*. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, *and doeth them not*, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it." (Matt. 7:21-27.)

We must *all* stand before the judgment seat of Christ to give an account of the deeds done in the body, and these deeds will

be classed as good or bad. (2 Cor. 5:10.) There will be no other classification. We will not be the judges of our own deeds or of the deeds of others, but Christ will be the Judge, and His decisions will all be final. There will not be another field day for us to try in another race. Nothing can change the decision at that great day of judgment, and it does matter what the decision is. Eternity is involved. "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." (2 Cor. 6:2.) We must *all* work out our own salvation with fear and trembling because it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Our God is a consuming fire. (Phil. 2:12; Heb. 10:26-31; 12:29.) Read and think seriously.

Some seem to think that all religious leaders are leading their followers to heaven. What if some present day leaders are like those among the Pharisees and Sadducees in the day of Christ? Many of them had been blinded by the God of this world, and if the blind lead the blind both shall fall into the ditch. (Matt. 15:14; 2 Cor. 4:3,4.) In our day or in any other generation Christ would say, "Woe unto you, ye blind guides." (Matt. 23:16. Read this whole chapter and see if religious leaders can be wrong.) "For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 5:20.) Was Christ here saying that we are all right and that one religion is as good as another? Was He saying that it is ugly to question another's religion since one is as good as another? We *all* need to search the scriptures daily, whether those things we hear are so. (Acts 17:11,12.)

"Beware," "Be not deceived," "Take heed," "Be vigilant," "Try the spirits," "Examine yourselves," and "*If* you do these things" are from verses that we need to consider. "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves." (Matt. 7:15.) These are words of the Savior. Who is a false prophet? Is one who teaches that which is false a false prophet? Do all teach that which will lead to heaven? Why were these teachers compared to ravenous wolves? Wolves and sheep are not alike, and it is not safe for the sheep and wolves to be in the field together. We should be able to tell the difference between a wolf and a sheep. They are different, you know.

The Spirit-guided apostle to the Gentiles wrote: "*I know* this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples

after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified." (Acts 20:29-31.) Was it all right to speak perverse things? Paul said that after his departure grievous wolves would speak perverse things to draw away disciples after them. This, in brief, is the explanation of how we got the ancient denominations, is it not? Paul warned night and day with tears to save as many from digression as possible, and he commended them to the word of His grace which could build them up in the most Holy faith, and keep them from falling. Why did he weep? Are all religious movements right in the sight of God? *We and all others* should realize that our adversary goes about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. (1 Peter 5:6-11.) To approve all religious movements is contrary to the will of God. Counterfeit religions is one of the devil's devices. (2 Cor. 2:11.)

"Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, *deceiving and being deceived*. But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them. And that from a child thou hast known the Holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." (2 Tim. 3:12-15.) We should all realize that no greater danger comes to our souls than that which comes from these evil men who deceive. The popular doctrine that nothing is wrong, but every religious movement, doctrine, and practice in religion is right overlooks the fact that *John was right* in his day when he wrote, "Beloved, believe not every Spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because *many false prophets are gone out into the world*." (1 John 4:1.) Paul said they would come as wolves, and the Master asked that we beware. This is so different from the Spirit of false security that claims that all religious movements are right and that we should warn no one of error.

There is something that may be called pernicious ways or damnable heresies, and there is something that is called the way of truth. Which would you suppose the many will follow? Notice very carefully what the inspired text says and believe it. "Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scriptures is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but Holy men of God spoke as they were

moved by the Holy Ghost. *But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not.*" (2 Peter 1:20-2:3.) *We and all others* must be able to discern between the Holy men of God who spoke and those money-loving false teachers who brought destruction upon themselves and upon the many followers of their pernicious ways. This passage teaches that some roads do not lead to heaven, does it not? The way of truth is what we all need. There are many counterfeit religions. Are we able to realize the danger so that we may search the scriptures for *the way of truth* which is mentioned? It was the right way of the Lord, but it was "evil spoken of."

What any of us says does not become the standard by which men are judged. If some say that there is a right way of truth and holiness that men must find and follow if they would enter in through the gates into the city, and others say that one faith is as good as another so that all religious people are right, neither group of men would have the personal authority to make their sayings binding. What does the Bible say? This is the real question. Does your Bible teach that you need not be very concerned because it does not matter what you believe since one way is as good as another? Have you carefully studied to see whether there is reason to be concerned and search? The Bible is a revelation of the will of God, and the Bible says the same to all who are searching with honest hearts. Are you convinced that modern America is getting its religious views from a careful study of the Bible? Does this matter? Why did God speak through His Son? (Heb. 1:1-4; 2:1-4.)

Some may say, "Our church teaches" this or that, and then they may ask, "What does your church teach?" Even within any religious denomination we might find many conflicting views. We cannot deny that within some building, with a sign saying that a group calling itself the church of Christ meets there, members may be found that conflict with one another. Where there is conflict there is error, and error is dangerous. It is truth that makes us free, and truths do not conflict. It is not enough to claim to be "of Christ." It is very important to be "of Christ," or followers of Christ. It is reported that one religious

group calls itself "The Holy Jumpers, Inc." Do you suppose this is the group Christ had in mind when He said, "Upon this rock I will build *my church*"? (Matt. 16:18.) An unscriptural name should awaken all to the danger of following their religious practices. A name may certainly reveal that some one other than Christ is the father of their beliefs, but name alone is not enough. It is not enough to claim to be His followers. The devil is glad to have some of his followers in the camp of the Lord. It is important to search to see what the scriptures teach. (Acts 17:11,12.)

Some of the most often quoted authorities in religion today are "I think," "My mother said," "Our preacher told me," and "I don't think it matters." What I think or you think has very little to do with determining what is right or wrong in religion. "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." (Prov. 14:12.) "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." (Jer. 10:23.) The entire will of God could have been written on one side of a postal card if it had been His will that every man do what seemed right to him. Every one would then have been a law unto himself. "In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes." (Judges 17:6.) Evidently that referred to civic rules and community life in general. Many seem to think that there is no higher authority in religion now than that which is right in their own eyes. Christ is our King, and He has all authority. (Matt. 28:18-20.) If we love Him, we will keep His commandments. (John 14:15,21,23; I John 5:1-3.)

"My parents said" is not the highest authority for adults in religion. "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me." (Matt. 10:34-38.) We are, of course, to honor our parents, but not above Christ. Our first loyalty is to Him. The parents of the last generation were as human as we are. Would we want our children to blindly follow us with no checking of their way by the scriptures? When the apostles went out to preach they turned the children from the idolatry and Judaism of their parents.

To you your parents may have been wonderful. You were greatly blessed if you had parents who were worthy of great respect, and you are to be congratulated if you showed them due honor. We all should show our parents respect and at the same time realize that Christ has higher authority in religious matters than they. He is the Judge that God has appointed. (Acts 17:31; 2 Cor. 5:10.) Many have asked me about theft parents. When they did, they asked the wrong person. Christ is the Prophet, Judge, Priest, and King. I can hold no higher office than that of His humble servant.

Children are willing to use correct grammar even though their parents may not have known grammar. They are willing to use better farming or business methods if they have opportunity to learn better. They may choose a different state as home, and have different political views, but they may profess to think their parents were infallible guides in religion. Some of this talk about what "my mother said" may grow out of indifference to religion that leads to no desire to investigate. 'Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves.'" (2 Cor. 13:5.) Are you willing to do this? Each gives account of his own deeds. If your relatives that are dead did miss the way, they are now eager for you to avoid their mistake. The rich man wanted Abraham to send Lazarus to his "father's house: for I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead." (Luke 16:27-31.)

I cannot say anything directly about your parents' being saved or lost. There are several reasons for my silence. This is written for the public, and I do not know every one's parents. In fact, no man knows his fellow man and the mind of God well enough to take the fearful responsibility of deciding destinies. If we should decide, the Lord would not go by our decision. I am one of the older segment of America's population today, and I know that my generation (the parents near my age and the older people to whom I preached many years ago) were not all infallible in religion. Ignorance of the Bible has been an impressive characteristic of the general public in the forty-five years I have preached. "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth," (2 Tim. 2:15.) "Wherefore let him that thinketh

he standeth take heed lest he fall." (1 Cor. 10:12.) Is this advice good or bad? Does it reflect on your parents or on any other person? The Bible is right, and it pays to be careful in matters relating to the eternal soul. (Matt. 16:26; Eph. 5:11-17.) We are calling facts to your attention. If your parents are of the highest type they will feel highly honored to have you search the scriptures for yourself. If they are right, your careful study will confirm it. If they are in error, you need to know for your own sake and in order to help them.

In religious discussions people often speak of those dear loved ones who are dead. Do you think they are lost? they ask. Let us admit that their destiny is settled. We cannot change it. I am not the judge, but I am to preach to you and seek to persuade you to obey the gospel, working "out your own salvation with fear and trembling." (Phil. 2:12.) Let me plead with you earnestly to think more of the souls that are influenced directly or indirectly by you. You cannot change the destiny of your dead ancestors, but you do have a fearful responsibility toward your children and grandchildren. In the future they may claim you as a pattern as you have claimed those who have gone on to their reward. Too few think for themselves. You must not lead your own descendants astray. Please be careful for their sakes as well as for your own sake. Your special responsibility is now, and it is pointing toward the future. Study the Bible because it is God's will for you and yours. (Deut. 29:29.)

Many years ago I heard an illustration. I do not know from whom, nor how much I have changed the details, but I want to use it. The story was of a man who made the flour and meal at the old water mill for the farmers who brought their grain. He also sold these products to others. The Bureau of Standards was set up, and a representative was sent out to check the units of measurement used by men in various businesses. He found the sturdy old metal container used by the miller too small. The miller said, "This business has been here a long time and was operated by my father before he died. This was his container. Are you saying that my father was dishonest?" The firm, quiet answer was, "I am not saying that your father was dishonest, but I am saying that you will be dishonest if you use it in selling your products now that you know it is too small!"

With permission I am including an article on *Attitudes and Information* by Connie Adams. The article follows:

"In order to please God it is essential that we have the right attitude toward Him and His word as well as the proper information. Israel was taken into captivity because they reached the

point of ignorance of God's will. 'Therefore my people have gone into captivity, because they have no knowledge.' (Isa. 5:13.) They had arrived at this point because they had developed the wrong attitude toward God and His word. 'Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? Nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore shall they fall among them that fall: in the time of their visitation they shall be cast down, saith the Lord.' (Jer. 8:12.)

"Jesus taught the same principle about acceptable worship and showed that it must be rendered in Spirit (the right motive) and in truth (the right information). (John 4:24.) Paul showed that the possession of spiritual gifts exercised without love (the right Spirit or attitude) was not profitable. (1 Cor. 13:1-3.) Paul said that in the gospel age that which avails is faith (which is based on the right information) which works by love (with the right attitude). (Gal. 5:6.) Again, he said, 'Speaking the truth (the right information) in love' (the right attitude). (Eph. 4:15.) While attitudes are so important, we must not minimize the fact that we must have the truth. No amount of sincerity and uprightness of purpose can compensate for a lack of truth. In this matter there are four possibilities open to us.

"1. *One may have the wrong attitude and the wrong information.* There are many in error because they do not want the truth. There are those who have voluntarily closed their eyes and stopped their ears. (Matt. 13:14,15; John 7:17; 3:20.) Those in this category rejoice in error and not in truth. (1 Cor. 13:6.) There are some who are not only ignorant of the truth but who are arrogantly proud of that ignorance. Such cannot be saved.

"2. *Some have the wrong attitude but the right information.* Every case in the New Testament where the truth was preached but rejected by those who heard was of this kind. The rich young ruler learned the right information, but his attitude toward the truth was such that he prized his wealth above it. (Matt. 19:16-22.) In Acts 7, Stephen's audience learned the truth but killed the preacher because their attitude was wrong. Many in the church are that way. They know where their duty is, but they do it not. (James 4:17.) This may apply to attending the services, giving, personal work, godly lives, or even to the problems over which churches have divided in recent years. When elders say, 'I know what you say is truth, but you cannot preach it here,' then they have the wrong attitude toward truth. In teaching the alien sinner we must impart the right information, but it must not be done with a know-it-all, haughty Spirit.

In reclaiming the wayward child of God, we must teach the truth about his true condition before God, but this must be done in the 'Spirit of meekness.' (Gal. 6:1.)

"3. *Some have the right attitude but the wrong, information.* Every case of conversion in the Bible was like that. Here were people who wanted to do right but who simply did not have a knowledge of the truth. When they learned the truth they readily accepted it because their hearts were right. Saul of Tarsus was ready to do whatever God wanted him to do. (Acts 23:1.) Cornelius wanted to 'hear all things commanded thee of God.' (Acts 10:33.) The jailer was baptized 'the same hour of the night' when the gospel was preached to him. His attitude was right. Wouldn't it be wonderful if all people every where had the attitude manifested by these?

"4. Thank God, *there are those who have the right information and the right attitude.* If we stand before God in judgment having either the wrong attitude or the wrong information we will be lost. Let each of us examine his own heart to determine his attitude, and then let us keep our minds open and receptive to divine truth. Only in this way can we please God."

Think for a minute of Saul of Tarsus and Cornelius, as mentioned by Connie Adams in the article above. It would have been a different story if they had been limited to the belief of their parents. There is no hint that they were eager to show disrespect for their parents, or that they did show such disrespect. Such men as they became would be an honor to any worthy father. If their parents were still alive they would now have an opportunity to learn the truth that can make men free from these happy converts to the gospel of Christ. Cornelius had kinsmen and near friends ready to hear Simon Peter. (Acts 10:24.) Saul, or Paul, visited Tarsus, his home town. (Acts 9:30.) If his parents were still living we may be sure that they heard the wonderful words of life. Lydia, the Philippian jailer, the Ethiopian nobleman, and others who could be mentioned obeyed the gospel when they heard it. They knew, and we all should know, that our first allegiance is to God. The big question concerns the will of God. What is His will?

There are other questions often asked by people who are hesitating to obey the gospel. "Do you mean to say that my Uncle John is lost? What about my mother who died last year?" I did not know your Uncle John or your mother, nor am I the judge. Concern is expected, but we must get our minds back to the will of God concerning what one must do to receive the gift of His grace. "But," you may ask, "what will happen to all

these good neighbors?" The answer is that each will give account to God for his own deeds. (Rom. 14:12; 2 Cor. 5:10; John 5:28,29.) Are you ready now to talk about the question: "Lord, what wilt thou have *me* to do?" (Acts 9:6.) You will have enough to answer for in answering for your own deeds, and it is absolutely impossible for you to change for better or worse the destiny of those who are already dead. If love for God prompts you to obey that form of doctrine delivered you (Rom. 6:7,8), there may be opportunities to change the direction of several who yet live. Think of your descendants. Your responsibility points that way. Most of the hundreds of your ancestors, both good and bad, have gone to meet their Maker. You cannot help them.

Honestly, I fear that most of these hundreds of dead ancestors (both yours and mine) and most of those millions of neighbors will be lost. "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to *destruction*, and *many* there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto *life* and *few* there be that find it. Beware of false prophets which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves." (Matt. 7:13-15.) Peter said that *many* would follow the pernicious ways of the false prophets who bring in damnable heresies. (2 Peter 2:1-3.) Luke records a conversation between our Lord and some one from the audience. This one asked: "Lord, are there few that be saved? And he said unto them, Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in and shall not be able." (Luke 13:23,24.) The popular idea seems to be that most are saved. Listen to the funeral sermons of all kinds of people. Read these verses again and many others similar to them, and then "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." (Phil. 2:12; I Cor. 10:12; Eph. 5:15; 2 Peter 1:10; etc.)

Look again in the verses mentioned above for the word "narrow." It seems that people are more afraid of being narrow in the sight of the crowd than of being wrong in the sight of God. Human beings are more likely to be followers than independent thinkers, so blind leaders and grievous wolves can draw away disciples after them. (Matt. 15:12-14; Acts 20:29-32.) Please do not doubt that there are many false prophets and deceitful workers. "But what I do, that I will do, that I may cut off occasion from them which desire occasion; that wherein they glory, they may be found even as we. For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of

Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works." (2 Cor. 11:12-15; I John 4:1.) Do you believe what these Holy men of God have written for our good by the guidance of the Holy Spirit? If you believe these men then you can see reason for the admonition given in Heb. 3:12,13: "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.' It is possible for believers to lose their faith and be lost. If not, what do these verses mean?

We have written of the difficulty of converting people to the right way of the Lord because they quote such authorities as "I think," "My mother said," "Our preacher told me," and "Our church teaches." It seems so ugly to people who quote such "authorities" that you would dare read from the sacred writings statements that flatly contradict what these "authorities" have said. They then bluntly state that every one has a right to his own views! Does the Lord have any right to His own views which evidently contradict these "authorities"? Whom shall we follow? What if there is some sacrifice in following the way of truth and holiness that leads to life? What if it is narrow and few find it? Listen carefully! "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it is of God, or whether I speak of myself." (John 7:17.) Do you believe this? Would you do His will now if you knew it? Then search as did the noble Bereans, and you shall find it. (Acts 17:11.) After it mentioned how they searched the scriptures whether those things were so, the next verse begins with these significant words: "*Therefore* many of them believed." Seek and ye shall find. Please do not close your eyes, stop your ears, and harden your hearts as some did when the Master taught. (Matt. 13:10-16.) The Master Teacher could not reach such people, and neither could the apostles.

From the parable of the sower we might say that there are three chances out of four that those who hear the word will be lost. (Matt. 13:1-23.) The preaching made no impression on the hearts of those represented by the wayside soil. The shallow soil type believed for a while but in time of temptation fell away. Those represented by the thorny soil never had time enough to worship, study, and work as they should for the Lord. The cares, riches, and pleasures took their time. The good soil that

did produce a harvest were the honest and good hearts who received the word and brought forth fruit with patience. Some of those "good" people that are referred to by some one who is looking for something to criticize in the doctrine of Christ are like some of those in the first three types of soil. We tend to overlook the indifference and weakness of faith on the part of dear "Uncle John" who petted us when we were children. We would assign him a place in heaven, but the Lord may not. It would be much better for us to give less thought to being conformed to and satisfied with the world, and rather be transformed by the renewing of our minds so that we may be living illustrations of the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God. (Rom. 12:1,2.) Let the inspired instruction and examples be our whole concern in our seeking of the way that leads to life.

The Jews who crucified Christ did it through ignorance. (Acts 3:17; Luke 23:34; I Cor. 2:8.) They were upholding the traditions of their fathers and leaders, but they were seriously wrong. Religious people are not infallible patterns. The apostles and the Christ before them tried to point out the serious errors, but the eyes of many were closed and their ears stopped. (Matt. 13:15.) They were bitter toward the Christ for questioning the traditions of their ancestors. (Matt. 15:1-14; Mark 7:1-13.) Search the scriptures and obey them for the Lord's sake, for your salvation, and for the influence you may have on the lives you touch.

Christ said, "Upon this rock I will build *my* church." (Matt. 16:18.) "Christ loved the church and gave Himself for *it*, that he might sanctify and cleanse *it* with the washing of water by the word, that He might present *it to Himself* a glorious church not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that *it* should be Holy and without blemish." (Eph. 5:22-27.) The church which we speak of is the one which the Lord purchased with His blood. (Acts 20:28.) Christ is "the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all." (Eph. 1:22,23.) This clearly states that the church is His body and this same book says, "There is one body." (Eph. 4:4.) What does this mean? Be careful. How many churches are named and described in the New Testament? Christ prayed earnestly, "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and ! in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent

me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me." (John 17:21-23.) Do you mind my quoting these verses? I sincerely hope it is not offensive. They are, as you know, from the good book. They should make me walk very carefully as well as you. We must not let money, pleasure, family loyalty, or prejudice hide the truth. In those early days "the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." (Acts 2:47.)

To which church did the Lord add the saved? Is there one church described in the New Testament, or does it describe three hundred churches with different terms of entrance, forms of worship, types of government, assignments or work or mission, standards of morals, and names? The truth is that the Lord had His plan from all eternity, and many men have come up with their own plans which differ very much from the one described in the New Testament. In speaking of His own mission, the apostle to the Gentiles said: "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Eph. 3:8-11.)

The church as planned by God, purchased and built by Christ, established on the first Pentecost after the resurrection under the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit, and spread over the world by the preaching of the Holy apostles and prophets, was a manifestation of the many sided (manifold) wisdom of God. The present confused, conflicting, and divided state of religion with its emotionalism, modernism, false prophecies, emphasis on recreation and country club type of social life, and disregard for the kingship of the risen Christ who died for our sins is a manifest token of the work of the devil. Please do not allow yourself to be among those who praise the present confusion of tongues on religious matters in preference to the beauty, wisdom, and remarkable simplicity of the church as described in the New Testament. There were problems in the churches in the first century, but it was not plagued and hindered by denominationalism that reigns supreme today. One great purpose served by the books of the New Testament was to correct the errors of that day for those churches and for all that would follow through the centuries. The epistles did not praise them for

the different doctrines and practices. They were rebuked for the perverted gospel and warned that more would come. Please read the following passages and observe the plainness of the rebukes and even the tears of the apostles as they thought on these damnable heresies. (2 Peter 2:1-3; Acts 20:29-31.)

Let us show by more direct quotations that the Bible does not teach that doctrine does not matter. Denominationalism such as we know today was foretold, and that was what the apostles were fighting. They were not saying that sincerity was enough or that doctrine did not matter. "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed. For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men I should not be the servant of Christ. But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." (Gal. 1:6-12.) Should you read this again with the question in mind as to whether one group who teaches another religious doctrine is just as safe as the one who teaches the doctrine that Paul taught? Does doctrine matter? No other sin is condemned in the New Testament as many times as the sin of teaching the wrong doctrine. Check this carefully for yourself. In earlier generations in America, religious people had more conviction and were not so inclined to think that every one was right. There were divisions, but each group thought it was right. Unity on "nothingness" is a doctrine of this generation especially.

"Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample. (For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.)" (Phil. 3:17-19.) Does this sort of thing have any parallel in our modern religious situation? Do you see why conscience will not let me make a statement giving blanket approval to all religious movements? There is no pleasure in being different or in being in conflict with neighbors, relatives, and friends. Please believe this. Con-

science is the driving force in pleading with people to speak as the oracles of God. { 1 Peter 4:11.) Eternity is too long to approach the day of judgment unprepared. (Matt. 7:21-23.)

The clearest explanation of the origin and cause of denominationalism that I know of is found in the first three verses of Romans ten. "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God." Can we not see that their own righteousness would not save? They were lost through ignorance of God's righteousness. Do you suppose that those working out the mergers in modern denominationalism have needed Bibles in their counsel meetings? Think about this. They did not come up with the Bible pattern for church work, church government, worship, or even the plan of salvation revealed so clearly in the book of Acts. It is a thing to cry about rather than a thing for which one should rejoice. One way to make worship absolutely vain or useless is to teach for doctrines the commandments of men. (Matt. 15:9.) That is the very basis of human denominations whose names, government, worship, and terms of entrance are not even mentioned in the Bible. I am trying to arouse the fear and trembling that would cause you to search the scriptures and take heed lest you fall. (1 Cor. 10:12; Phil. 2:12; Acts 17:11,12.) If people will open their eyes they will see that many dangerous doctrines are abroad. How can we persuade them to "strive to enter in"? (Luke 13:23,24.)

An outstanding belief of the American public is that none should preach against the doctrines and practices of other religious people. There is one thing, at least, we can say for this attitude. It is far different from the Spirit of those who beat, imprisoned, burned, or killed with the sword those with whom they differed. Many of the wars, much of the civil strife, and much of the cruelty to millions of tortured people have been in the name of religion. Many bitter modern conflicts are between religious groups. We may marvel at the spiritual blindness of such people who so completely ignore the teaching of the Lamb of God whom they claim to honor.

Christ sent His disciples out as sheep, but not as wolves. They used no carnal weapons even though they suffered much at the hands of others. They were to turn the other cheek, but they were not to smite the cheek of the other. They were sent

out to teach the whole counsel of God even though this brought suffering to them. They suffered for righteousness' sake, but they did not form rock-throwing mobs to destroy others. These servants under the direct influence of the Christ were as doves and sheep, not causing others to suffer. They were taught to overcome evil with good. (Rom. 12:17-21.)

What do people mean when they say that they do not believe in preaching against other people's religion? Do they mean that one cannot be wrong in his religious beliefs to need warning? It is easy to be wrong in religion, and it is very serious because eternity is involved. Few find the narrow way that leads to life, and many go the broad way to destruction. (Matt. 7:13,14.) Should we be concerned that many are following a perverted gospel? (Gal. 1:6-12.) Would it make sense to give our smile of approval to the soul-destroying perversions? Grievous wolves will draw away disciples after them. These wolves may be in sheep's clothing. The Christ, Paul, John, and other Spirit guided men warned of the danger. (Please take time to read Matt. 7:13-15; Acts 20:29-31; 2 Peter 2:1-3; 1 John 4:1.) People need to be warned of the danger of teaching the wrong doctrine because men, or even an angel, will stand accursed before God if he teaches a perverted gospel. (Gal. 1:6-12; Titus 3:9-11; 1 Tim. 6:3-5.) The blind followers of such teachers are also lost and need to be warned. (Matt. 15:1-4.)

Each man should give diligence to make his own calling and election sure, and he should reprove, rebuke, exhort, as well as instruct and warn others because there is great danger in heresy. (2 Tim. 4:1-5; 2:15-18; Titus 1:11-13; 2:15; 2 Peter 1:10; Phil. 2:12; I Cor. 10:12; Heb. 3:12,13.) This message will come through with great force if you will take time to read and study these references carefully and prayerfully. Will you take the time?

We are to love our enemies. We are to harm none. For love's sake we should teach, warn, reprove, and rebuke every creature. This is the Master's will. It is the truth, and only the truth, that makes men free. (John 8:31,32.) Speaking the truth in love is an act of friendship and ought to be appreciated. (Acts 20:17-32; Eph. 4:15.) Paul's question in Gal. 4:16 is still a good one. He asked: "Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?" Many books of the New Testament were written to warn and rescue people from the deadly effects of false teaching--to speak against their religious doctrines and practices, if you will. Read the letters to the Galatians and to the Corinthians, for examples. Paul loved them enough to tell

them the truth with great plainness of speech.

When people say that they do not believe in preaching against others' religion, they are usually saying that it is always an example of ugly self-righteousness to do it. They may sometimes be simply saying that they think it will do no good and will only win their III. will. For our own spiritual welfare we need to warn of error because we want to be pure from the blood of others. "Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God." (Acts 20:26,27.) Good is accomplished by such bold preaching. A bold proclamation of truth does awaken some. Many true Christians today were once in grievous error. Think of the great soldiers of Christ who fought a good fight in the pagan world nineteen hundred years ago. It is this earnest contention for truth that men need to turn them from "darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and may have an inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith." (Acts 26:18; Jude 3.)

Yes, the very books of the New Testament were very bold and frank efforts to warn against and correct error. Such can also be said about the teaching of Christ. He warned His disciples to *beware* of the "doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees." (Matt. 16:12.) There were no more popular or influential denominations among the Jews in that generation. He did not say that both movements were right. Christ loved these people well enough to preach the truth to them even though it led to His crucifixion. He died for sinful men, but He did not condone theft errors; nor did He flatter them to keep them satisfied in damnable heresy. Read these sad words from the Master's sermon: "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? and then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, you that work iniquity." (Matt. 7:22,23.) Was it ugly to warn these people while they had time to repent? Would it be today? Would it not be rather an act of friendship?

Maybe the millions of Americans who say that they do not believe in preaching against other people's religion are thinking of judging. At least, we can say that such people often quote part of Matthew 7:1, out of context. They say: "Judge not, that ye be not judged." That is what Jesus said as He began this great teaching on judging, but the Master Teacher said more. He made it clear that He was talking of the harsh, unfair

criticism of the hypocrite, who, with a beam in his own eye, was staring at the speck in his brother's eye. This man could have seen more clearly to help his brother if he had removed the log from his own eye. Christ was not asking that we never do any kind of judging, which would be the same as forbidding our using any kind of judgment.

Judgment is the mental process by which we are able to see differences and likenesses. It is discernment or good common sense. According to the Christ, we are to "judge, not according to appearance, but *judge righteous judgment.*" (John 7:24.) Righteous judgment is not forbidden, as is the harsh judgment of the hypocrite. In fact, in becoming Christians, and in continuing as faithful Christians, we must distinguish between good and evil. Men of God are commanded to reprove, rebuke, exhort, and warn others. This could not be done properly without the "righteous judgment" that Christ commands. (See Titus 1:13; 2:15; 2 Tim. 4:1-5; Acts 20:29-31.) As we develop skill in righteous judgment, we come to be of the "same mind and the same judgment." (1 Cor. 1:10.) One cannot be a Christian without this righteous judgment that we "may approve things that are excellent." (Phil. 1:10.) It is very unfortunate that Christ is accused of forbidding good men to judge so they can make wise decisions, correct their own lives and the lives of their friends, and give moral support to those who are standing firmly for the truth.

Some are looking for faults in others in order to slander. Some see faults in those they love and use wisdom and patience in helping them make correction. These two types of judgment are as opposite as daylight and darkness. Parents need to judge wisely in dealing with their children. Love should fill the hearts of mature Christians when they see and deal with faults in brethren. (Gal. 6:1; James 5:19,20.) Faultfinding that one may slander, and rebuking that others may be sound in the faith are as unlike as day and night. Since heresy must come, and it can damn the soul, we need to work out our salvation with "fear and trembling," and exhort "one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." (Heb. 3:13; 1 Cor. 11:19; 2 Peter 2:1-3.) This takes "righteous judgment" which is commanded. Please do not overlook this fact.

Sometimes we may tell ourselves and others one thing as an explanation of our actions and attitudes when there is another subconscious reason. We may say that we do not believe in preaching against other people's religion when our desire for

their praise and friendship is far greater than our interest in their spiritual safety. When people have gone beyond the doctrine of Christ they have cut themselves off from God. (2 John 9-11.) If they add to God's word, God will add the plagues. (Rev. 22:18,19.) If they preach another gospel they pervert the gospel of Christ and stand accursed. (Gal. 1:6-12.) Should Paul have written to the Galatians and to the Corinthians to warn them? Was he judging them in a sinful way or was it righteous judgment? When religious people have obviously *changed* the pattern of church government, baptism, the Lord's Supper, the work or mission of the church, the plan of salvation, church music, etc., they need help. "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men." (2 Cor. 5:11.) When a good man speaks the truth in love in trying to help these people, please do not sit off and criticize, hindering his worthy effort, by saying, "He is judging." He is commanded to use righteous judgment in fighting a good fight for the truth.

It is because the doctrines of men make our worship vain that we need to fight a good fight. (Matt. 15:9; I Tim. 1:18; Eph. 6:10-19; Jude 3. Are you willing to read these?) Our weapons are not carnal, but they are "mighty through God to the *pulling clown* of strongholds." (2 Cor. 10:4,5.) We must wrestle against sin. The jelly fish attitude of compromise, flattery, and the condoning of error was not a trait of the Master. He sought to change the "status quo," not to approve it. Preachers are not sent out into the world to keep it as it is. They are to seek to make the changes that will improve it. There is a price to pay for telling the whole counsel, but loyalty to Christ and love for the souls of men should demand it of us all. (2 Tim. 3:12; Luke 6:46; Matt. 5:10-12.) Let us pray for boldness rather than for the love of error. (Eph. 6:18,19; Acts 4:29.)

Sometimes after a very practical lesson to the church, some good member will jokingly say: "You sure would have hit them if they had been here." Is it not actually true that people do tend to push the truth aside by thinking of some living or dead relative or friend as if the sermon were preached to these who could not hear it? Sermons are preached to those present, and if the preacher is a faithful man of God, he is trying hard to help you and others who are present. Do not allow concern for a dead friend or sympathy for a living friend hinder you from hearing the truth. If every way is safe, why are there so many warnings about false teachers in the good Book? We are to walk by faith that comes by hearing the word of God. We are to be judged by this book, and each individual will be on his own at judgment

day. Awake to righteousness. Turn from the very common careless unconcern and indifference. Such an attitude is based on ignorance of God's righteousness and a failure to investigate. Be noble and search the scriptures. (Acts 17:11.) Lean not on your own understanding. (Prov. 3:5.)

Some have no real convictions because they have lost their faith, or they have very little faith. To them the Bible is a book and not *the* book. We would expect them to say that they do not believe in preaching against other people's religion. They think of religion as a psychological sedative, at most. They think that this life is the only life and if a man likes his superstitions, let him keep them. The church, according to these people, could well be a glorified country club, providing pleasant social life for all ages. It does not matter to them which church sponsors the steak supper, the scout troop, or the ball team. They do not know of sin, salvation, and heaven. Their Christ is a man who died long ago and is still dead.

Men of strong faith who love the Lord recognize His authority and the narrowness of truth. (Matt. 28:18-20; Eph. 1:22,23; 4:1-6.) Their earnest desire is to preach the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth to those who are present and willing to hear. Their teaching includes the many positive principles of righteousness, and they oppose men's changing these principles. They believe that their own salvation and that of their friends may well depend on their earnest contention for the faith that was once for all delivered unto the saints. (Jude 3.)

The lax and careless attitude held by many in American Protestantism has come into the church that claims to speak as the oracles of God. (1 Peter 4:11.) One of the greatest marks of this digression, that shows up often in private contacts, is that changes in the organization, work, and worship of the Lord's church are not considered serious. "We are all going to the same place," they say. "We ought not to be so narrow." Institutionalism is only one chapter in this big story of digression unfolding before us among so-called churches of Christ. There are more and more people who claim to be Christians only who would not even enjoy hearing a preacher in the pulpit read: "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and in you all." (Eph. 4:4-6.) The book that is to be opened before us at the judgment reads as it always has read since it was first given by the Holy apostles and prophets who spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. It is not a signboard saying "The Church of Christ Meets

Here" that saves. Neither is it the building beyond that sign that saves. Even the people that meet in that building cannot guarantee your salvation. Several of those who attend there may be lost. The necessary thing is that we actually do the will of the Father in heaven as the Master taught in Matt. 7:21. Each individual is on his own. It is true that the Lord adds to the church those who are being saved. (Acts 2:47.) We may be sure that He adds to His church of which He was speaking when He said, "I will build my church." (Matt. 16:18.) He does not approve of churches with different doctrines and practices. He would refer to these as false doctrines and to those who advance them as false teachers. He would say, "Beware of false prophets." Our great task is to please Christ who is to judge us all according to His word. He has told us before what He expects. He is not trying to surprise us as to the basis of His final judgment. Do not allow living or dead relatives or friends to hinder your searching of the scriptures. Study to show *yourself* approved of God. (2 Tim. 2:15.) The Lord may long ago have removed the candlestick from some group which meets behind the "Church of Christ" sign. It takes more than claim or pretense, but the real divine plan for His church is beautiful.

We are not saying that all children should follow a different pattern of religion from their parents. We are saying that Christ must come first in our choice of religion. Our Lord's comment is that "he that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me." (Matt. 10:32-39.) We are to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. (Matt. 6:33.) Please free yourselves from all alliances that would hinder your doing the will of the Father who is in heaven. The way of truth and holiness is narrow, but it leads unto life. (Matt. 7:13,14; Isa. 35:8; 2 Peter 2:2.) It is sad but true that the way of truth now is and has always been evil spoken of. Sin is deceitful. (Heb. 3:12,13.) There are many false teachers of whom we should beware. (Matt. 7:15; I John 4:1.) These are things we have been saying and plan to continue saying.

Parents and friends in error are not the only powerful influences that hinder our seeing the truth. The love of money and material things that money can buy may win our love until this materialism becomes our God. (Col. 3:5; Eph. 5:5; 1 Tim. 6:7-12.) This is a pleasure mad world seeking money at any price, even at the loss of the soul. (Matt. 16:46.) This pleasure is but for the moment, and heaven is lost by the worship of this idol. Are you too busy in the rush for money and pleasure to worship the God who made you?

Some heartily say that they agree that we must go by the Bible, but they suppose that all preachers do go by the Bible because they all do sometimes read from it. One confused man told me of going to a religious discussion. He could hardly stand it, he said, because one speaker would get up and read his doctrine out of the Bible and then the other would get up and deny it and also read from the Bible. The preachers were teaching opposite doctrines, so at least one was misusing the Bible. The word of God can be handled deceitfully. (2 Cor. 4:2.) The devil could quote scripture. (Matt. 4:6.) Here is the place for the righteous judgment which the Lord commands. (John 7:24.) "For every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." (Heb. 5:13,14.)

Please remember that servants of the devil can use scripture out of context to prove whatever they desire to prove. No better proof of this could be found than the use of the Old Testament scriptures concerning the return of the Jews from captivity to prove that Christ is to return soon to Jerusalem to set up an earthly kingdom. Some are deceived and say, "He read it right out of the Bible." We should rightly divide or handle aright the word of truth. Beware! Take heed! Be not deceived!

We and all others should know we have an adversary. "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world. (1 Peter 5:8,9.) We should also know that the devil appears as an angel of light and his servants as ministers of righteousness. (2 Cor. 11:12-15.) There is a great difference between the man who uses the Bible to deceive and the one who faithfully and skillfully uses it to save souls. "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, pastors and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: 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: 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.*" (Eph. 4:11-14.) We must not speak words of approval for all that goes on in the name of religion. Much is serious error, and from the

wrong motives. (Titus 1:11; 2 Peter 2:3; 2 Tim. 4:3; Phil. 3:17-19; Rom. 16:17,18.)
Read these passages carefully and prayerfully and then walk circumspectly. (Eph.
5:11-17.) Beware of false prophets.

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