



The Reflector

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Can We Say it Better than God?

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Man, in his arrogance, thinks that he can say things better than God said it in His Book. Why do folks have to go to great lengths to tell us that while “this is what it says, but this is how it **really** is.”

When Jesus told a woman “**Your faith** has made you well” (Matt. 9:22), did it require a long explanation how it **really** was not her faith that made her well, but God’s power, in order for God to get the glory.

When Luke wrote that Peter said, “Save yourselves...” (Acts 2:40 KJV, ASV, RSV), did he feel compelled to give a long explanation that they could not **really** save themselves, but it was **really** God that would save them.

When Paul wrote, “Work out your own salvation...” (Phil. 2:12), did he insert an extra two or three pages explaining how man cannot **really** work out his salvation because all that is left up to God?

When the Hebrews writer wrote, “He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him” (Heb. 5:9), did he quickly inject a note telling us that while one needs to obey Him that **really** it is not the obeying Him that would save him but the sacrifice of the Author?

When Peter wrote, “baptism doth also now save us” (1 Peter 3:21), did he then take up a lot of space telling us that baptism does not **really** contribute to our salvation because we are saved by the grace of God?

No, the New Testament writers did not seem to think that mentioning something that man does as

saving him took away from glorifying God for providing that salvation. Nor did they seem to think that in order to magnify God required negating or minimizing anything that God says saves us – even anything that man must do. Thus, creating the impression that man’s contributions to his salvation is not all that important as long as he gets the “grace” part right.

So, when we read that something saves us, whether something God does or did, or something man does, we need to just accept it. If it is something that we must do, just do it, and urge others to do. Yes, when I read in one place that grace saves us, it **really** saves us. Also when I read that faith saves us, it **really** saves us. When I read that baptism saves us, it **really** saves us.

It is kind of like reading accounts of the rescue of a drowning man by a lifeguard tossing him a life line. One account may simply read, “The lifeguard saved him.” Another may say, “The life line saved him.” Another may say, “Grabbing the life line saved him.” Another may say, “He saved himself by holding on to the lifeline.” All would be true and neither account would minimize the importance of the other. It would be unbecoming for one who really loved the lifeguard to get upset when he reads that “by grabbing the life line he saved himself” to get into a tizzy and rebuke the writer for taking away from the credit of the lifeguard by saying the man somehow saved himself. The fact is, every account is true and gives at least one aspect of how the man was **really** rescued. The fact that one might feel the need to further

investigate the rescue to find out who tossed the life line does not take away from the importance of accepting that “he saved himself by holding on to the lifeline.” When he investigates and finds out who the thrower was, he will praise his name for his work without which the downing man would not have been saved. But he would not chastise the man who reported the man “saved himself by holding on to the line” for not giving the lifeguard his proper glory.

So, the truth is, when we read separate accounts of what saves us, that they all save us and if there is anything in any one of the accounts that we must do for ourselves, we accept it and do it at the same time giving God the glory for making that particular thing save us – along with anything else we may read elsewhere in God’s word that saves us. ■

Closest Convictions

Dan Shipley

John 12:42-43 says: “Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.” From its beginning, the cause of Christ has suffered because of disciples with closet convictions; the kind of men who know and believe the truth but will not stand up for it. Consider, for example, these influential rulers of our text. Potentially, their worth to the cause of their un-confessed Christ was immeasurable; effectively, however, they contributed absolutely nothing. Worse, their influence remained where they did, as must always be the case. What a testimonial to the tremendous swaying power of cowardice and pride! It keeps them among those whom they oppose and puts them in opposition to their own faith and convictions. “But after all”, they may have reasoned, “we do have our standing in the community to think about.” And, besides, how could we ever explain to our friends of the synagogue circle about what we really believe?

Why, what would they think?” So goes people-pleasing religion.

And so stay the people-pleasers in religion --- in their “synagogues” of compromise and out of God’s kingdom. But most of them do not see their “going along” as being all that serious, let alone as jeopardizing salvation. For example, it is not unusual to meet denominationalists who freely admit certain unscriptural practices espoused by their church, but will not speak out against them. They know and believe certain Bible truths, but will not practice them, for fear....? Now, what is the essential difference between these and the elders of our text? Is it less honorable to deny Christ than His word? The false idea that men can honor Christ while ignoring, perverting and desecrating His doctrine is of the devil! “He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him-- the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day” (John 12:48). Man’s part in gaining a right standing with God lies in his knowing, believing, and obeying of gospel truth (John 6:45; 8:32; Mark 16:16; Romans 6:17; James 1:21-22). Every right relationship with God is a truth determined relationship! All that God requires of man and all that man can ever do to please and glorify God is made known in His word (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 John 9). He who shuns it, compromises it, or adds to it reflects on the God who gave it (1 Thessalonians 4:13), whether Jew, denominationalist or Christian.

In recent years, many members of the church of Christ have “awakened” to find themselves in “synagogues” of liberalism. They share the dilemma of the rulers to some extent. “Shall we speak out and risk being put out --- or shall we go along to get along?” May God help them to see the seriousness and importance of standing up for the Lord by standing for His truth. To continue “going along” is to continue violating conscience and fellowshiping error. Friend, your influence is where you are. Demonstrate your allegiance to Christ and His truth while you can!

“... Let God be true, but every man a liar ...”

Spiritual Inertia

Jonathan Carswell

Newton's First Law of Motion: An object in motion will remain at rest unless acted on by an unbalanced force. An object in motion continues with the same speed and in the same direction unless acted on by an unbalanced force. This is often called "the law of inertia". It was fun to test this law and other laws of physics in my physics class. When I considered this law of nature, I noticed that it is true, not only in the physical aspect of nature, but in our spiritual lives as well.

One thing everybody that has ever existed has in common is that we were all children. Children are a product of their environment. Children absorb what they see on television, what they see and hear their parents do, what they see and hear other children around them do, and this list goes on. To better illustrate this idea, consider the speech process. English is the national language of the United States. When a child learns to speak, they begin to try and form words that they have heard their parents, primarily, and other people around them say. To those whose native language is English, you speak English because that is the language that you heard, observed, and learned from your environment. This stands true for any environment, children in Mexico learn to speak Spanish, children in Germany learn to speak German, children in China learn to speak Chinese, etc. If this law were not true, then my parents may speak English, and, without having any contact with anything concerning Japanese, I would learn how to speak Japanese, and we know that this is not true.

Complying with our analogy, children are "objects at rest". The forces that act upon them will shape and push them in a certain direction. As they grow older, children become objects "in motion". As parents/guardians, when you see your child/children going in a direction that is contrary to the will of God, apply an "unbalanced force" to hinder that direction, and push the child in the proper direction. For this reason, God commands

parents or guardians to use the "force" of his word to guide their children at an early age (Prov 22:6). A specific aspect of parental guidance is physical "force" which should be applied to train the child in making correct and incorrect decisions (Prov 23:13-14). Throughout biblical history, children follow the example of their parents. I believe that this idea is best illustrated during the period of the divided kingdom. Ahaziah, king of Israel, was the son of Ahab and Jezebel and the Holy Spirit reveals that he did wickedly in the sight of God as both of his parents had done (1 Kings 22:51-52). Amaziah, king of Judah, was the son of Joash, and the Holy Spirit reveals that he did what was right in the sight of the Lord as his father Joash had done (2 Kings 14:1-3). It is quite evident, after studying this period that, generally speaking, the princes of Israel and Judah followed in the footsteps of the kings before them. To parents/guardians, it is imperative that you train your child/children in the ways of the Lord through early teaching and correction, but also through your personal actions and example. Both of these aspects are noticed by children and are equally important in the mind of the child. Often times, parents use this phrase in training children, "do as I say, not as I do". Now, there may be a small number of occasions where this phrase is needed, but generally speaking, this phrase is used by parents/guardians to justify their own ungodly actions after observing their child/children acting in the same manner. Paul tells young Timothy to be an example in word and in conduct (1 Tim 4:12). Though I am not a parent/guardian, I do understand that the role of a parent/guardian is not always easy, but this cannot be an excuse to forsake your parental duties. Godly parents are needed in the Kingdom of God to establish a pattern for children to follow, in which the word of God is used as the standard for what is right and wrong and God becomes the center of our lives for years to come. ■

Word Study From 104 A.D.

Robert Turner

There is much controversy regarding the word used in the N.T. to designate Gods people, the ekklesia The studious will be interested in this quote from Light From The Ancient East by Deissmann, an authority in his field. (Pp. 112—f.)

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The first scattered congregations of Greek-speaking Christians up and down the Roman empire spoke of themselves as a (convened) assembly; at first each single congregation was so called, and afterwards the whole body of Christians everywhere was spoken of collectively as the (convened) assembly. That is the most literal translation of the Greek word ekklesia. This self-bestowed name rested on the certain conviction that God had separated from the world His saints in Christ, and had called or convened them to an assembly, which was Gods assembly, Gods muster, because God was the convener.

It is one of the characteristic but little considered facts in the history of the early Christian missions that the Latin-speaking people of the West, to whom Christianity came, did not translate the Greek word ekklesia (as they did many other technical terms) but simply borrowed it. Why was this? There was no lack of words for assembly in Latin, and as a matter of fact contio or comitia was often translated by ekklesia. There must have been some special reason for borrowing the Greek word, and it lay doubtless in the subtle feeling that Latin possessed no word exactly equivalent to the Greek ekklesia.

There is evidence of this feeling even in non-Christian usage. Pliny the Younger employs the Latinized word ecclesia in one of his letters to Trajan. Some years ago a bilingual inscription of the year 103-4 A.D. came to light at Ephesus, which furnishes a still more interesting example. It was found in the theatre, the building so familiar to readers of Acts XIX, one of the best preserved ruins in the ancient city. A distinguished Roman

official, C. Vibius Salutaris, had presented a silver image of Diana (we are reminded at once of the silver shrines of Diana made by Demetrius, Acts XIX, 24) and other statues that they might be set up in every ekklesia in the theatre upon the pedestals. The parallel Latin text has, ita ut (om)n(i) (e)cclesia supra bases ponerentur.

The Greek word was therefore simply transcribed. Here we have a truly classical example (classical in its age and in its origin) of the instinctive feeling of Latin speakers of the West which afterwards showed itself among the Western Christians: ekklesia cannot be translated, it must be taken over.

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While we are gasping at this depth we may as well note that Christians at Corinth were called (to be) saints just as Paul was a called Apostle. The thought is NOT that they were designated or given the name saints but that they were set-apart as the result of Gods holy calling. (1 Cor. 1: 1-2) The church is Gods (convened) assembly, Gods muster, fruit of His calling. ■

A Pretty Good Deal, Wouldn't You Say?

So Jesus answered and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, "who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time--houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions--and in the age to come, eternal life. "But many who are first will be last, and the last first." (Mark 10:29-31 NKJV)

Yes, being a faithful Christian costs a lot – ALL in fact (See verse 28). But, look at the dividends! All over the world we have, as a result of our fellowship with other disciples, spiritual kinfolks a hundredfold along with their houses and lands at our disposal as if they were our own. Yes, with all of it comes persecutions. But, we have the Lord and these spiritual kinfolks to help us bear it. Then to cap it all off, we have in the world to come eternal life.-EB