

GENTLE SHEPHERD MINISTRIES

CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH ~ MAKING DISCIPLES ~ EQUIPPING THE SAINTS FOR MINISTRY

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The Odyssey

Part 1

THE PEAK

By Rayola Kelley



The title of this new series may remind you of Homer's epic poem about King Odysseus. He was the king of Ithaca, as well as a Greek leader in the Trojan War. Apparently after the war he wandered ten years before reaching home. As you probably already surmised, this series will not be about this wandering king.

The truth is that as Christians we are on an odyssey. We are strangers to this world, pilgrims in our search for our final home, and priests and royalty of an unseen kingdom (*1 Peter 2:11; Revelation 1:6*). However, the different challenges we face threading through the various terrains of the world can also cause us to become wanderers, somewhat lost, a bit disoriented, and uncertain about how to choose from the many paths that lie before us.

As I meditated on my past adventures, I realized that I could also recount my journey. Granted, we all have our own path and journey that we are currently on. We see different terrain as we wrestle with diverse problems or situations. However, we all end up learning comparable lessons, coming to like conclusions, and coming to rest on the same foundation of life and hope. For this reason one's journey can become a place of remembrance of what was, a place of encouragement of what can be, and a place of rest of what will be when the journey comes to an end.

There are times in my life I look back at the spiritual journey I have been on. At the beginning of my Christian life, I did not realize I was

about to embark on an incredible odyssey. It never dawned on me that even though I had received Christ as my Lord and Savior, I had not really arrived. Granted, I had discovered an amazing peak in my life that brought such joy to my spirit, but I also would soon discover that my salvation experience was simply just that—a peak.

A peak may be an elevated point in your life, but it is not a place for putting down any real stakes. It is a point that gives you a different view, but such an overview lacks the details that can often derail one on his or her journey. Such a peak may also give you a sense of infallibility. There can be such ecstasy to what you initially experience and see that it is hard to believe that the probabilities of defeats and challenges in the future would even cause you to blink, let alone experience a deep sense of despair in your soul. However, this is the reality of the journey that awaits the spiritual sojourner.

Looking back at my peak, I realize that it represents the height to which the Lord had brought me from the depth of my despairing abyss. One can only reason that after floundering around in a pit of emptiness and desperation, when once delivered from it, you will indeed automatically find yourself on an elevated place, a peak of some type. The height of my peak simply represented the depth of the abyss from which I was delivered.

In a way, I was given insight into a very special lesson. The lesson was that the height God is able to bring you to will be determined by the depths in which He is able to reach into your life. I often mention this simple principle. Although it may seem obvious, silly, or redundant to some, it is a life principle that will constantly prove true as one travels through this world. Jesus put it best when He asked Peter who would show the greatest appreciation: the one who has been forgiven little or the one who

has been forgiven much. The answer is obvious.

When God first found me, I was in a deep pit of sin. It had taken great failures for me to realize the profundity that my sin had on my soul. After all, before I fell into my pit, I thought of myself as a pretty decent person. As I compared myself to others, I felt I could hold a high opinion of myself for I was not such a wretched soul as so and so. I did not realize at that time that my high opinion of self was swinging from the deceptive branches of conceit. My height of arrogance was simply setting me up for the type of fall that was awaiting me. Years later I had to agree with the conclusion that the farthest distance for most people is the 18 inches that separates their minds from their hearts. The source that causes this great gap between these two areas is nothing more than pride.

When the fall came, I did not realize what had happened. It did not become obvious that I was in a great pit until I began to hit the walls of my abyss. I had a sense something happened to me because I felt depression grip my soul. The first wall I ran into caused confusion. I could not sense where I was. This was the first time I had a sense that I was lost. The problem with being lost is that it creates an unexplainable crisis.

I could not tell you why I was lost or what I was lost to. I always thought I knew where I was, yet I could not grasp my situation. I always perceived myself as being intelligent, but I found myself becoming uncertain about my perception. My confusion turned into skepticism as I realized that I did not trust anything around me, especially my conclusions. I found myself groping against the wall of my abyss which brought me to the next wall—that of anger.

Much of my anger was silent. My plight seemed to be unjust. I had striven to be a good person; and, of course, bad things do not happen to good people, right? Granted, there were flaws in my character that I did not appreciate, but I was trying to hold it altogether. In

my naïve reality, I felt that if circumstances were different, fair, and pleasant for me, that all would be well with my world.

I would learn much later that such a perception is a sign of immaturity, inexperience, and wishful thinking. The “old man” in us always wants to be pampered, spoiled, and protected. It does not want its feigned character to ever be tested by adversity. It is for this reason that only the weak in character allow circumstances to become an excuse for unbecoming attitudes and behavior. I would later discover that godly character can only be forged in one’s makeup once he or she personally decides that he or she must take responsibility for how circumstances are going to define and impact his or her attitudes and responses. As believers, we must always choose the excellent road of righteousness.

Even though I had a sense I was lost, those around me could see no real change. The things that were plaguing me also plagued them. Granted, some wore their plight quite well, but nevertheless, they were also silently struggling with unseen issues. Whether it is pride, fear, or the attempt to pull yourself up by your own bootstraps, it is easy for inner prison bars to develop around such people, causing them to feel isolated in their present struggles.

The next wall I encountered in my abyss was hopelessness. I was a hopeless mess. After all, I could see no way out of my dilemma. However, such failure did not serve as a reality check as to my real limitations; rather, it became an affront against my intelligence and abilities. I should “know” how to resolve such issues, but the truth is I did not know. Clearly, I was not divine and I had no means to change my present reality.

The remaining wall was resignation to simply give in to the force of the gales that were smashing against my resolve. I accepted that I would become nothing more than a cork on the ocean of the world, exposed to all the destructive elements. Obviously, I had to accept my lot in life.

The final wall of resignation produced a silent desperation in my soul. I did not want to accept such a lot. I was not a Pollyanna optimist,

but I did not want my hope to drown in the hallow vacuum that seemed to consume anything in my life that had any semblance of optimism attached to it. However, I did not know where I could find hope in my despairing situation.

As I considered all that surrounded me, my soul became more desperate. Where could I look and where could I go to find hope that would become the wings that would lift me out of my abyss? Everyone can guess where I found my hope. I found it in Jesus Christ. He is the end of all searches and the answer to all questions regarding life.

As Christians, we need to expect that part of the spiritual journey will consist of those circumstances that will bring us into an utter state of desperation. Perhaps you are at this stage. There may be an inner struggle of desperation that threatens to escalate into a volcanic state of eruption. If you are there, you need to be open to examine some matters in your spiritual life.

Born Again (John 3:3, 5): Those who are spiritually lost eventually become desperate souls. Are you a Christian in title only or have you truly been born again of the Spirit of the living God? This means sin has been addressed in your life because it has been confessed and is under the blood of Jesus. You now have the seal of the Spirit upon your life and are learning to follow after Him in the ways of righteousness.

Sin: Is there sin in your life? God will not answer those who conceal any iniquity or moral deviations in their lives and He will turn away from those who are walking in sin (*Psalms 66:18; Isaiah 59:2-4*). Not only is sin isolating you into a pit of defeat, but you are also separated from God. You need to turn from your sin in repentance, confess it as so to the Lord, and flee the lusts that have beset you to once again experience blessed fellowship with Him.

Test of faith (1 Peter 1:6-9): The Lord wants to grow us up. However, our faith must be tested to reveal our inner character and our source of reliance in times of challenges and crises. It is not unusual for God to allow the waves of circumstances to hit the shoreline of our lives. The waves will wash away any sands of beliefs that are not founded on the Lord. They will show us the extent of our character

and reveal the depth of our faith.

Keep in mind that it is easy to believe one has faith when he or she has not really been tested. It is also easy to believe each of us has character when we feel on top of things, but those times that lack adversity are not a reliable gauge in which to examine such matters. Faith is a choice, and character is a process. Faith is not carried over from yesterday, but must be chosen at the time of the test. Once a person chooses the way of faith, God is able to give him or her a measure of faith to help him or her through the new challenge (*Romans 12:3*). The walk of faith will bring one to a place of restful confidence and assurance in the Lord.

Character is not something we always have at the time of a trial; rather, it is what is often developed during the test; that is, if we make the right decisions. Clearly, we cannot have too much character. Obviously, faith must be chosen at the beginning of the test, where character is what must become our preference during the test. We must choose to walk in the ways of integrity and righteousness during the trial. Once character becomes the preference, then it can be established in our inner being as a reality.

Take courage in your situation: The extent of your desperation will determine the height in which you will be delivered by the Lord. His arm is never too short to reach you no matter how deep the abyss (*Isaiah 59:1*). As previously stated, the depth of your pit will determine the height of your peak. However, you must seek Him for deliverance. You must be sincere about learning the lessons of your trials. And, you must realize that He is the only One who can lift you out of your pit. Upon your deliverance, you will indeed end up with a new view of matters. It will be refreshing and liberating, but do not get too comfortable. The peak may give you a wonderful overview of the terrain, but you still must sojourn through the terrain that lies before you so that you can reach your final destination.

In time you will see the significance of these times of testing. It is in such times that you learn God is indeed faithful and true to His Word. Even though He may seem far away,

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BOTH SIDES OF THE COIN

By Jeannette Haley



In the physical realm, everyone knows that there are two sides to every coin. The same concept can be applied to the non-physical realm as well. For example, “flat thinking,” or consistently operating with a one-dimensional viewpoint can result in a person becoming a veritable pinhead. The word “pinhead” came into being around the year 1593, and it means a very dull or stupid person—a fool, sort of like a dumb sheep, I suppose. To me, one contributing factor to being a pinhead is the failure to use what brains and common sense God gave in the first place. Critical thinking and the ability to reason needs to be encouraged and developed in people, starting at an early age, so that genuine hunger and thirst for godly wisdom is acquired. Without the wisdom from above, which is revealed in God’s Word, who or what can guarantee protection from the propaganda pitfalls, lairs of liars, and sinkholes of sin that are swallowing up the entire world?

While these statements may conjure up thoughts of crafty, half-crazed politicians, which is definitely applicable, we, nevertheless, need to seriously consider the spiritual dangers of “flat,” one-dimensional thinking. Let’s face it—the planet is literally crawling with religious pinheads, mindless and gutless sheep who are content to remain complacent in their changeless, comfortable little corner where their concept of God is all warm, fuzzy, futile, and fruitless. After all, they have Him all figured out, you know, and have even made “deals with God” that override the plan of salvation according to the Bible. There is no doubt about it, religious pinheads know one side of the coin very well when it comes to God, and it all boils down to the familiar *God is love* cliché. Technically, etched and deeply engraved on one side of the beautiful gold coin it indeed tells us that *God is love*. That much the wise can agree with—to a point and as long as there is a *balance*.

However, much to the chagrin of

the “flat thinking” folks, just leave it to the critical thinkers to come along with their dimensional thinking and throw a monkey wrench into the mix by exposing the other side of the coin. On this side of the coin, just as elegantly engraved are the words, *God is holy*. One coin, two different facts about God. On the *God is love* side we can picture the beloved disciple, John, with his head resting on Jesus’ chest, while on the *God is holy* side we see this same disciple falling “*at his feet as dead*” *Revelation 1:17a*.

Now, before anyone gets their fancy feathers ruffled, I am not saying that everyone who emphasizes that *God is love* is a pinhead. Far from it. But, if that is *all* a person emphasizes, then their theology is as warped and useless as a bottomless coffee cup. How many people are banking that they have a pass into heaven based on a counterfeit coin that proclaims, *God is love* on both sides? That type of thinking is as one-dimensional as a one-note song.

People who have been marinated only in the *God is love* philosophy, having never been properly disciplined concerning God’s other attributes, such as His holiness, develop a spiritually weak, warped, and unbiblical belief system. This is perilous because it allows for a person to embrace a completely different Gospel, different Jesus, and different Spirit. The danger is, of course, that such erroneous conclusions blind even the most sincere person as to his or her own spiritual state, not to mention the damaging influence he or she has on the souls of others. Only God knows how many souls have been eternally lost because of wrongly concluding that God’s love automatically gave them a free pass into heaven with no admission of sin, genuine repentance, or obedience to God on their part. Such people reason that if God is love, then He wants them to be happy, healthy, and wealthy regardless of the means they use to achieve such goals. After all, because God loves them, His stamp of approval must surely be upon their lives even though they think like the world, live like the world, look like the world, and, in fact, love the world. Surely, because “God is love” then sin isn’t really such a big deal in our post-modern era.

Even Satan knows differently.

There is another side to the coin.

God says, “*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*. “*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*” *1 John 2:15*. Does this mean, then, that we are to try and live in some joyless, miserable, religious straightjacket, not appreciating God’s creation, or enjoying life at all? Of course not. Verse 16 brings clarity to this subject, “*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.*” These three points are a study in and of themselves, but suffice it to say that temptation always comes along one, or a combination of, these lines. Thank God, He doesn’t leave us hanging in despair, for verse 17 gives us the key to hope and joy through obedience, “*And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.*”

Dimensional thinkers know that true faith demands real action; that is, turning away from the way you are going (repentance) to follow the Lord and do His will. The question is, what is the will of God? In writing to the church at Thessalonica, Paul instructed, “*For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication*” *1 Thessalonians 4:3* (Emphasis added.) “Sanctification” means being set apart—set apart to God and to holiness, regardless of the sin in question. One can almost hear the heart cry of the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Ephesian believers as recorded in *Ephesians 5:1-6*, “*Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour. But fornication, (Greek: porneia from where we get the word pornography; includes harlotry, adultery, incest, and idolatry) and all uncleanness, (impurity, either physically or morally) or covetousness, (greed) let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are*

not convenient (proper): but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.” (Emphasis added.) Jesus prayed for the sanctification of His own, for all who believe in Him, (including you and me) as recorded in John 17:17, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.”

1 Thessalonians 3:12, 13 also gives us a picture of both sides of the coin where we are concerned. “And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men . . . To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints. (Emphasis added.) For those who desire to have the love of God perfected in them, John wrote, “But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him” 1 John 1:5. Therefore, we see that a one-dimensional, self-serving view of “love” doesn’t fit on the same coin as God’s love which is perfected in His own through obedience to His Word. Concerning the holiness side of the coin, Peter, writing by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, nails it down in his first epistle, “As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance (being a pinhead?): But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation (behavior); Because it is written, Be ye holy: for I am holy” 1 Peter 1:14-16. (Additions added.)

Oswald Chambers (24 July 1874 – 15 November 1917) was truly gifted by God as a man with keen spiritual insight, and the ability to bring the proper balance and perspective to spiritual truths. Commenting on 1 Corinthians 1:30, “But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption,” he wrote: “Jesus Christ did a twofold work for us and in us, technically called *justification* and *sanctification*. God justifies us as Christ was crucified and risen outside us; God sanctifies as Christ is

crucified and risen within us. God glorifies in virtue of both, as Christ is enthroned in the fullness of power.

“We have *justification* as we are seen in Him. We have *sanctification* as He is seen in us. We have increasing glory and ultimate *redemption* as both of these divine works of grace combine in the sovereign purpose of God.

“The forgiveness of sins is not the sole purpose of the atonement; it is but the means to a redemptive purpose—namely, holiness. Justification is the road to holiness, and to stop spiritual progress at one without the other is to annul both. Our Lord’s work of grace produces the greatest fact on earth, a saint—i.e., a holy man or woman.

“Holiness, not love, is the greatest thing in the world; for holiness is the basis of love.” (From, *Devotions for a Deeper Life*, pg. 19.)

I don’t know about you, my friend, but I, for one, don’t want to be a pinhead when it comes to spiritual matters! Not to say that there haven’t been times and seasons in my life when I was a genuine, bonafide pinhead, complete with the T-shirt and hat to go with it. But, the truth is, God calls us to shake off our narrow-minded, dull, and dead status-quo state of snoozing under our spiritually flabby, warm, fuzzy “love blankie” of self-satisfaction so that we can follow Jesus to new heights of glory, power, and life in Him! Are you up to the challenge? †

THE MODERN PROPHET A.W. TOZER

“We need a baptism of clear seeing. We desperately need seers who can see through the mist—Christian leaders with prophetic vision. Unless they come soon it will be too late for this generation. And if they do come we will no doubt crucify a few of them in the name of our worldly orthodoxy.”

“Refuse to be average. Let your heart soar as high as it will.”

“The faith of Christ offers no buttons to push for quick service. The new order must wait the Lord’s own time, and that is too much for the man in a hurry. He just gives up and becomes interested in something else.”

STRAIGHT FROM THE HEART OF MARV ROSENTHAL

The Gospel of Matthew informs us that Jesus is the long-promised King of the Jews. His genealogy is traced forward from the patriarch Abraham through King David to His mother Mary (Matthew 1:2-18). Jesus has the legal right to rule over Israel. In Matthew, Jesus is presented as the promised **King**.

The Gospel of Mark emphasizes that Jesus is a servant. No genealogy of Jesus will be found in Mark, because the genealogy of a servant is insignificant. Instead we are told, “For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). In Mark, Jesus is portrayed as a **servant**.

The Gospel of Luke explains that Jesus is a man. Like Matthew, but unlike Mark, Luke does present a genealogy. It begins with Joseph, the husband of Mary, and traces the lineage all the way back, not simply to Abraham as Matthew does, but to Adam (Luke 3:23-38). In Luke “the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). In Luke’s Gospel, Jesus is revealed as a **man**.

The Gospel of John declares that Jesus is God in flesh. In John, the reader will find no genealogy because Jesus is without origin. John commences his Gospel like a piercing laser beam with seventeen words. John writes, “In the beginning [any beginning of which the mind can conceive] was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word [logos] was [face to face with] God” (John 1:1). “In the beginning was the Word” proclaims the eternity of Jesus. “And the Word was with God” proclaims the equality of Jesus with the Father. “And the Word was God” proclaims the identity of Jesus. In John’s Gospel, Jesus is declared as **God**.

If God is holy, so is the Word.
If God is all-powerful, so is the Word.
If God is loving, so is the Word.
If God is faithful, so is the Word.
If God is merciful, so is the Word.
If God is infinite, so is the Word.

in reality this is when He is the closest. His ear is extended towards you in readiness to respond to unfeigned faith, His heart is sensitive to your plight and ready to enfold you in comfort and compassion, and as He waits in the shroud of darkness for the time He will bring you into the light, He is guiding you to walk in line with the unknown path before you. Keep in mind, faith always leads down paths that you have not traveled before. The path may be unknown to you, but it is not unknown to your Lord. He already has gone before you, and He has specifically prepared the way for you to walk in order to discover how much fuller your life can be in Him.

Desperate times are part of the spiritual journey, but they give God the opportunity to find you in a state in which He can go deeper in order to bring you higher in Him. Even though desperate times make us feel as if we are falling into a crevice of nothingness, we can always trust that in the end we will fall into His loving arms of comfort and deliverance. †

COMMENTS

"We love you and are grateful for your work on His and our behalf. You are in our prayers." - MT

"The Harbinger is NOT a word from GOD, but rather just another money-making scheme....IF this all were TRULY an insight into God's Word, would it be SOLD for a profit??? Seriously, if YOU were given something you believed to be directly from the Spirit of God, and was a warning to ALL Believers, would you spread it far and wide, or would you make a plan to SELL IT for profit? Is God a respecter of persons that this man was given the 'inside scoop' and we are not able to access it by simply reading His Word? The Harbinger, and all of the follow-up fluff and DVDs and CDs, are just more profit, for a false 'profit'! One more scam to siphon off money from the undiscerning sheeple!" - FL

"We are being hit on all fronts. The churches have been infiltrated and we have been taught to throw our arms around Goliath (Islam) and smooch him...while Goliath is planning to take over the USA. - WA

RAYOLA'S Q & A CORNER

WHAT IS THE UNPARDONABLE SIN?

Q: *What is the unpardonable sin?*

A: This is a good question. Even though many Christians know the answer to this question, they do not always understand the implications behind it. In fact, many act as if different sins, such as murder and divorce are unpardonable, but the Bible is clear that there is only one grave offense that cannot be pardoned by God. Granted, some sins are considered abominable to the Lord, but upon repentance of such sins, He is still able to pardon the individual and cleanse him or her from all unrighteousness because of the work of redemption. However, for the one unpardonable sin, there will be no grounds available in which a person can receive a pardon. It is also true, the consequences for some sins are irreversible as far as what one might reap in this lifetime, but if forgiven, it will not be held against the person on the Day of Judgment; but, for the unpardonable sin there is no place of repentance.

As you will see, the unpardonable sin is not just a matter of rebelling against God by trespassing His Law or covenant. It is not just an issue of failing to do right or being flippant about the things of God; rather, the unpardonable sin is a complete personal affront against God. It is not a matter of saying something in a fit of anger; rather, it is diabolical calculation of the heart to not only falsely accuse God, but accredit something to Him that is utterly opposed to who He is. Such accusation is for the main purpose of disregarding anything associated with the matter as wrong, insignificant, and foolish. It is not only a matter of rejecting overtures from Him, but harboring a mocking and scornful attitude towards Him.

This is confirmed by the attitude or action associated with the unpardonable sin, and that is blasphemy. "Blasphemy" means to vilify. Such vilification towards God begins with an impious attitude that is void of any real respect or regard towards God or the matters of His kingdom. Since the attitude is present, action will follow. The

action of blasphemy in relationship to God is to speak evil against that which is associated to Him with the intent of putting it in the wrong light. It also will cause the person to rail on the point of contention while reviling its truths and fruits with scoffing.

With this in mind let us now look at the incident where Jesus clearly defined this unforgivable offense in Matthew 12:24-32. The interaction that took place where the unpardonable sin was mentioned occurred between Jesus and the Pharisees. The first thing the Pharisees did was show total disregard for Jesus by accusing Him of casting out devils by the power of Satan. This was a calculated affront on Jesus' character and His authority by religious people who did not love the truth nor were they interested in seeking to properly discern the spirit that was present. They also had no real concern about the godly fruits that also followed the miracles.

Jesus refuted their evil accusation by stating that a kingdom divided against itself will not stand. He then inferred that He cast out devils by the Holy Spirit. In essence, the Pharisees were accrediting the power that was prevalent in Jesus' life as being from Satan, rather than from the Holy Spirit.

Jesus also explained that blasphemy against men and even against Him could be forgiven, but to accredit the power of the Spirit to Satan, to speak evil of His miraculous working, and to rail on or mock His authority with blatant disregard was something that heaven could not, and would not, forgive. This brings us to the real crux of the matter, which is the character and work of the Spirit.

The Spirit is the last front where salvation is concerned. He is the One who convicts of sin to bring a person to an awareness of his or her need of salvation. If a person rejects such conviction, the Holy Spirit will withdraw His presence.

The Holy Spirit is holy and can only land where the ground of a person's heart is tender. If He seeks to land, but the heart is hard, He will be grieved and will lift off of the profane

ground, leaving those who are hard and defiant against the Lord to taste the judgment that has already been pronounced on the god of this world.

Upon salvation, the Spirit will come into our lives to powerfully recreate a new life that becomes an expression of righteousness. To incorrectly judge, mock, or rail on His work of regeneration and edification in the lives of others or on behalf of others is to try to personally quench Him in the Body of Christ, causing Him to quietly recede to a place where the accuser will no longer retain any real knowledge of God.

Even though Jesus invites man to be saved, it is the Father through the Spirit who draws him to receive the real work of redemption. Without the drawing or conviction of the Spirit, there is no means by which man can be saved. Therefore, the Holy Spirit is the last hope or means by which a person can receive salvation. If He is accredited with evil, mocked for His power and goodness, His work rejected because it has been ascribed to Satan, and completely stripped of His authority in the mind of the person, this will mean that the complete testimony of God has been thrust on the trash heap of unbelief and mockery. Since all that is holy, true and right has been cast aside, this leaves nothing for the Holy Spirit to work with; therefore, He has no other choice but to completely withdraw His presence from that person.

Dr. Gary Cohen in an article he wrote for the magazine, *Zion’s Fire* made this statement about this subject: “The unpardonable sin involves even more than saying a final ‘No’ to God. It is also making a final spiritual decision to attribute the entire testimony of God, by His Spirit through His Son, to be the work of Satan. It is labeling the ultimate good as evil. This is such a blasphemy that the Spirit of God no longer deals with such a person.”

The Pharisees blasphemed Jesus because they chose not to believe His testimony that was confirmed by the miracles. Today there are people who try to erroneously ride on the reputation of the Spirit, while out of jealousy often accredit His intervention in the

lives of others as being fleshly or demonic. There are on the outside fringes of the work and move of the Spirit who are ignorant of His ways. As a result, they mock and deride what they do not understand.

Today, I fear that there are some in the religious realm who possess much religious creed, but do not know the Holy Spirit. Subsequently, there is a danger for such individuals to blaspheme. Although such blasphemy may not be calculated, those who call on the name of the Lord must be careful to properly discern the spirit behind all matters. In order to properly discern as believers, we must ensure that we understand the character, ways, and work of the Spirit according to the Word of God. †

CHRISTIAN PERSECUTION

(Excerpts from *Suffering in the End Times* by David Ettinger, ZION’S FIRE, Vol. 23 No. 5)

Christian persecution today is just as bloody, brutal, and satanically driven as ever. In fact . . . accounts of Christian suffering seem like an aberration to ‘Western’ Christians. After all, doesn’t the Bible tell us that Christians will live lives of ease and comfort, and that when the day of God’s reckoning comes, we will be spirited away by the Rapture before the Antichrist begins his deadly reign upon the earth?

Not quite.

Consider the following facts and figures:

- Since the birth of the Church, it is estimated that approximately 72 million Christians have been martyred for their faith.
- Of this 72 million, it is shocking to learn that 48 million Christian lives—almost 67 percent—have been snuffed out since the year 1900.
- From the middle of 2008 to the middle of 2009, about 176,000 Christians were martyred. This averages roughly 482 deaths per day—one every three minutes.
- In other words, more believers have been killed since the year 1900 than throughout all of Christian history up to that point. If the current numbers hold, the horrific

reality is that the twenty-first century will see more Christian martyrs than in any century preceding it.

Yet, in spite of these heart wrenching statistics, a woefully small fraction of Western believers in the United States, Europe, South America, and Australia have any notion whatsoever about what is happening to their faithful brothers and sisters in Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and regions of Central and South America. While persecuted Christians attend church at peril of their lives in these places, Western Christians luxuriate in relative comfort and ease by comparison. Where persecuted Christians sit in church wondering whether a bomb will tear through their building, the minds of too many Western Christians begin to ponder at what restaurant they will eat following the service, or which football game they will sprawl out on their sofas to watch throughout the afternoon.

Such “easy” Christianity has given Christians a sense of invincibility regarding their faith. They acknowledge that Christian freedoms in America and Europe are eroding, but so long as they escape physical attack on both family and property, then all is well. In reality, Western Christians know little, if anything at all, about truly suffering for their faith.

Throughout its history, America has been the most blessed nation on the face of the earth for three primary reasons: its original status as a nation founded upon Judeo-Christian principles; its faithful sending of missionaries to the ends of the earth; and its support of Israel. God has rewarded these three laudable attributes of our nation by blessing the U.S. more than any nation in history (though these blessings are evaporating rapidly as the nation continues to turn a cold and hostile shoulder to the God of the Universe). However, Americans have taken God’s blessings for granted, and we, as a nation have grown spiritually soft. Comfort has usurped evangelism; entertainment has nullified daily, in depth Bible study; and the quest for wealth has dulled Christian sensitivity about the lost, perishing state of our families, our neighbors, and our co-workers. †

(Scriptures: Rev. 12:11; Heb. 11)