

GENTLE SHEPHERD MINISTRIES

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

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THE REALITY OF GOD

Part 11

By Rayola Kelley

When I was saved out of a cult, I was ecstatic. In my original religious life I had struggled as to how I could make my wretchedness acceptable in my own power, but at the lowest point of my life I learned that Jesus came to address my sin and take it away. However, in my immaturity, I never realized how He also came to address my condition of sin.

It is easy to see sins that are a moral affront against God. It is understandable why God may not approve of those questionable things that must be hidden under the fig leaves of personal justification, the heavy robes of self-righteousness, and covered over by the thick darkness of unbelief and rebellion, but what is hard to get our minds around is that there is nothing good in our flesh (*Romans 7:18*). We always want to believe there is something salvageable in us that God can reform and use, but that concept is unscriptural. It took a few more years and many detours for me to somewhat realize just how far mankind fell in Adam.

It was my spiritual immaturity that found me taking detours in my initial salvation. These detours are not unusual, but they are very humbling. I am sure you might relate to some of the following detours that I foolishly embarked on.

1. I majored in Scriptural knowledge rather than seeking to know God through His Son, Jesus Christ.

2. I made Christianity a religious practice in lieu of developing a personal relationship with Him by first learning what it means to sit at His feet as a student and at His table of communion where I would partake of who He is by faith.

3. I erected religious bandwagons made up of dogmatic notions that

I could tout my knowledge and self-righteousness from, while omitting my real responsibility to love and serve the Lord by serving others according to my commission and high calling.

4. I looked to man to lead, rather than looking to Jesus as my Lord and Head, while being led by the Spirit.

5. I expected to be immune from personal challenges because after all I was a Christian, and only good things happen to good people (Christians). I did not realize that character and faith are produced in adversity for the purpose of actually preparing me to be a consolation to others in their plight (*2 Corinthians 1:3-7*)

6. In the end, I knew of the Lord, but I did not know Him in a personal way. I knew much about the written Word, but the life was missing from it because I failed to come to the knowledge of the Living Word, the Lord Jesus Christ.

It soon became obvious that I may have been saved out of a cult, but not all of the cult was out of me. I had been conditioned to be seduced into the cult through indoctrination. Needless to say, in my unsaved state I was being indoctrinated as a product of this doomed world, designed to taste the empty, despairing, tormenting ways of hell, forever separated from my Creator by my sinful condition.

As a new believer I struggled with my vague notions about God, but as Jesus Christ began to become the face of God to me, I began to receive and accept the idea of God. However, it was after the various detours that I could finally come to a real knowledge of Jesus, a knowledge that made Him more real to me than life itself. He was no longer bound in a box of limited doctrinal, dogmatic understandings, but He was real, living, and One who was far beyond any human logic or reasoning.

It was from the premise of this knowledge that I could relate to Jesus as Man, causing God to no longer

seem vague, impersonal, and unreachable to me. As I embraced the humanity of Jesus, His deity became the bridge of grace that connected me to the reality of the Father's love and the communion inspired by His Spirit (*2 Corinthians 13:14*). Instead of God appearing aloof, I could receive the fact that He was familiar and aware of me. Instead of God being too high to reach, all I had to do was reach up by faith, and gentle arms would reach down and receive me.

The more I grew in the knowledge of Jesus, the more I found myself loving God. The more the Spirit of God unveiled Christ to me in His humanity and deity, the freer I was able to worship God in Spirit and truth. This brings me to the importance of understanding the need for God to take on a body of flesh. In His humanity Jesus makes God real and personal to man, and in His deity, He makes man acceptable to God.

Admittedly, my understanding of Christ possessing dual natures did not happen overnight. It started from a small seed of faith, for the Bible declares it; therefore, I choose to believe it is so (*Romans 10:17*). As I studied the New Testament, I found myself coming to a place of awe as I meditated on such Scriptures as John the

Baptist's statement in *John 1:29-30*, "The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: **for he was before me.**" [Emphasis added].

John was conceived at least six months before Jesus' miraculous conception in the womb of a virgin. Yet, John makes it clear that Jesus existed before he ever was. Jesus may have come into the midst of humanity through a virgin birth in order to take on a body to be the Lamb of God, but He clearly existed in the heavenlies and it was the Father who sent Him into the world with a mission. Various Scriptures in John verify that Jesus was sent by the first Person of the Godhead into the world (*John 3:17; 4:34; 5:23-38; 6:29-57; 7:16, 28-33; 8:16-42; 12:49; 14:24; 17:3, 18-25; 20:21*). Since Jesus was a sent one, the writer of Hebrews rightfully called Him an Apostle (sent one) in *Hebrews 3:1*.

How many times does a matter have to be declared before people believe it is so? If a person has not the mind, the desire, or the love for the truth to accept a matter as being so by faith, he or she will reject a matter regardless of the various testimonies clearly established in the Word of God.

Another Scripture I just love to meditate on is *John 8:56-58*, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad. Then said the Jews unto him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham? Jesus said unto them, 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am.'"

Anyone who knows the story of Moses' experience in the wilderness knows that Jesus was using a name of God to identify Himself, and the actions of the Jews reveal that they likewise understood what He was declaring about Himself (*Exodus 3:14*). The name "I AM" has to do with who God is and His authority and power to bring something about. There is nothing that can be added to who He is or subtracted from who He is because He is I AM. As the "I AM" time and eternity come together according to His purpose. It is where the past and

future come together in the present to ensure that His perfect plan is being brought forth in relationship to redemption. The extraordinary fact about the Gospel of John, which clearly presents Jesus as God Incarnate, is that Jesus used the term "I AM" at least 35 times to identify that He was deity in human form.

Jesus said of Abraham that he had desired to see the day of the Messiah's visitation, and that he actually saw it. *Hebrews 11:17-19* tells us that Abraham received the figure of Jesus in the offering of his own son, Isaac. Isaac was a type of Christ in *Genesis 22*, casting a powerful shadow of the time the Son of God would walk among men. In fact, we have to remember that the light must first be present before a shadow can be cast. The light, Jesus existed from the very beginning, casting the necessary light to illuminate the image, patterns, types, and shadows. That is why John calls Him the light of the world (*John 1:4-5*). Let us consider the incredible similarities.

Like Jesus, Isaac's conception was miraculous. His father Abraham was 99 and his mother was 89 when he was conceived. Clearly, his mother, Sarah was far past the child-bearing age, but as we know, nothing is impossible with God.

Abraham's faith in regard to offering up Isaac in *Genesis 22* was founded on the promise that since Isaac was the promised son that God would raise him up. When God provided the sacrifice of the ram as a substitute, Isaac was in a sense raised up, while we know Jesus, the Son of the Living God gave His life up on the cross, but He rose from the grave.

Both Isaac and Jesus were designated to be burnt (consecrated) offerings on the altar, totally consumed by the fire of judgment. Jesus carried His altar, the cross, while Isaac carried the wood upon his shoulders that would be used on the altar. Isaac spent three days traveling with his father to the spot where he would be offered. Even though Abraham was a man of faith, he most likely perceived his son being dead, separated from him for a short time in that three-day journey, while Jesus' body spent three days, and nights in the tomb after He was offered as the Lamb of God. He likewise tasted a temporary separation from the Father

as He became a sin offering and was hidden from mankind for three days and three nights.

Abraham clearly saw the day of Jesus and understood the significance of His mission and rejoiced over the outcome. He understood that God provided the sacrifice, replacing Isaac, who at that point represents a church that will be brought forth in a glorious new way because Jesus became our substitute. What an awesome revelation Abraham had of the future Messiah who would come as a Lamb of God to take away the sin of the world.

Another statement I always stop and meditate on is found in *Mark 12:35-37*, "And Jesus answered and said, while he taught in the temple, How say the scribes that Christ is the son of David? For David himself said by the Holy Ghost, The LORD (Yahweh-Father) said to **my** Lord (Adonai-Jesus), Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool. David therefore himself called him Lord; and whence is he then his son? And the common people heard him gladly." (Emphasis added.)

"Christ" is the Greek name for the Hebrew name, "Messiah." Another title that means the Messiah is "The Anointed One." We know that Jesus must come from the lineage of David to claim the throne of David, making Him a son or descendant of David. We know as King, He will conquer all of His enemies and put them under His feet as defeated foes.

Jesus makes reference to scribes in this verse. Scribes were also referred to as lawyers when it came to the Law. *Smith's Bible Dictionary* explains how the scribes wrote out the law as well as arranged its precepts. During Jesus' day their words were honored above the Law, and it was a greater crime to offend against them than to offend the Law. Jesus was using the scribes' teaching that identified the Messiah as being the son of David to make a valid point as to who He was. Using the scribes' own teachings simply added weight or authority to the question that Jesus was about to ask, "If the Messiah was David's son, why is it he called Him Lord?"

Jesus' teaching pleased the

common people, but if there was a scribe around, how do you think this question affected him? Jesus said things that could crack any box of theology wide open, challenge any school of thought, and turn a dogmatic mind into a pretzel. It was clear that the Messiah would have to be a man if he was going to be a king who sat on the literal throne of David in Jerusalem. However, to consider the Messiah as having existed before David, that even the respected king acknowledged His existence by addressing Him as **my** Lord showed that Jesus, was not simply a man, but He was (Adonai) deity as well.

As we can see, when we consider Jesus to be the Messiah in light of Scripture, we must note even David attached deity to Him. The Messiah would have to be both the Anointed One of God and Adonai to sit on the throne of David as his descendant and king.

There are some fascinating aspects attached to Jesus as the Messiah. The first one is that in His humanity He had to be anointed of God. We read how the Holy Spirit came down on Jesus at His baptism and anointed Him to preach the gospel to the poor in spirit, heal the brokenhearted, preach deliverance to the captive, to recover the sight of the blind, and to set at liberty them that are bruised (*Matthew 3:13-17; Luke 4:18*). Jesus was anointed to be the great physician of the soul and spirit, to bring spiritual deliverance to the oppressed and salvation to the lost.

It is for this reason we find this warning in *1 John 2:22-23*, "*Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son. Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: (but) he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also.*" Is it any wonder that in the prophecy concerning the Messiah quoted by Jesus from *Psalms 110:1* that both the Father and Son are mentioned because you cannot believe the Father without believing in His Son and you cannot believe the Son unless you believe He was sent from the Heavenly Father to carry out a specific mission.

The other part of Jesus being the Christ has to do with Him coming

back. In *Matthew 24:23-24*, He gives us this warning, "*Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there: believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.*" I stand in confidence that as part of the very elect, I will not be deceived because of God's faithfulness and power to keep me. However, my part is that I know the real Jesus, stand on His truth about Who He is, withstand with His promises, and continue to stand because of His faithfulness.

Jesus said He is coming back, but how? *Luke 24:51* and *Acts 1:9-11* describes how Jesus ascended in the clouds, and the same way He was taken up in the clouds is how He will come back again. We don't have to run here or there or contend with every imposter that comes along claiming to be the Christ. We know how the Messiah will come back, in the clouds, in glory, and in power. Every eye will see Him coming back in His new glorified body as the King of kings and Lord of lords. His enemies will see and ask for the rocks to fall on them, and the Jewish people will see and mourn because they will know that He was the One they rejected and crucified (*Zechariah 12:9-10; Revelation 1:7; 6:15-17*). This is a promise we stand on as our blessed hope, ever looking up knowing our Redeemer draws nearer each day, and in spite of the scoffing and the taunting as men's hearts grow cold with fear in these dark times, we continue to stand, knowing that He is faithful to fulfill all of His promises.

As believers we are the most blessed people in the world. We have everything going for us, a present help in these precarious times, a refuge in the storms that are affronting us from every side, and a bright future where the God/Man will rule as Righteous King of all, Lord over all, and God who will ultimately rule above all. ✠



COMMENTS FROM FRIENDS AND READERS

"Good stuff, as always. . . your newsletter resonated. That religious spirit Rayola talked about is alive and well [in a particular church]. The church has become a monument to itself and to the founding pastor and his legacy, and to Fundamentalism. Hollow, and ineffectual." - VA

"First of all thank you ever so much again for the newsletter....I so enjoyed your article last month on A Living Sacrifice—so true and plenty to chew on. Also yours and Rayola's this month [July] as well. Ever so right on the button and plenty to think about. So much horror around the world and chaos and suffering! Can hardly stand it." - BC

"What arrogance that anyone should think they can 'update' 'improve' 'make it easier to understand' etc. etc God's Word. Every modern Bible has been translated from the fraudulent so called 'Greek' texts that were created by Westcott and Hort, practising satanists and occultists, but people rarely research these facts, yet the Bible is the most important book in the whole world, the whole earth, the whole heavens !!!!!" - UK

TELLING IT LIKE IT IS A. W. TOZER

"The fact is that, we are not producing saints. We are making converts to an effete type of Christianity, that bears little resemblance to that of the New Testament. The average so-called Bible Christian of our times is but a shallow display of true sainthood. Yet, we put millions of dollars behind 'movements' to perpetuate this lower form of religion and attack the man who dares to challenge the wisdom of it."

Effete: "having lost character, courage, strength, stamina, or vitality."

"If the Lord shows me judgment on America, then this is what I speak. "My Father works and I work." I only do what I see my Father do

"Any faith that must be supported by the evidence of the senses is not real faith."

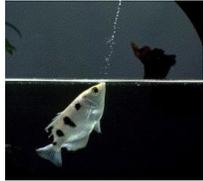
DARE TO DISCERN

Part One

By Jeannette Haley

“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.” – Hebrews 5:13, 14

One of the quickest ways nowadays to put certain Christians on the defensive is to mention the need for discernment. Faster than an archerfish can shoot, sink and swallow his prey, up goes a wall of resistance as the old cliché of “Don’t judge” permeates the atmosphere. Sometimes a person gets so weary with trying to stand for biblical truth that you just want to “pick up your marbles and go home.” Perhaps the Apostle Paul felt akin to that when he said, “*But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant*” 1 Corinthians 14:38.



Thank God there still remains a remnant of thinking believers who love and fear God, know His Word, walk in His ways and who love the truth, regardless of what it costs them. They refuse to become caught up with what I call “PCCP” (Political Correctness of Church Politics) because they have, with their whole hearts, “bought the truth,” and refuse to sell it for any price. (“*Buy the truth, and sell it not; also wisdom, and instruction, and understanding*” Proverbs 23:23.) These saints know that godly discernment is not something that is based on judgmentalism, pride, prejudice, rebellion, or elitism; rather, they know full well that without spiritual discernment Satan will succeed in deceiving not only individuals, but whole church bodies.

Love for the truth is absolutely essential for any believer. (For years I have circled the word truth when reading through my Bible as a somber reminder to myself that truth is essential to salvation and Christian growth, and that I better get it right.) Remember what Jesus called Himself in John 14:6, “*I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.*” The word “truth” is flanked by “the way” and “the life” because

without truth people can make up their own “way” and pursue another “life” to their own destruction.

Truth is the foundation for all godly discernment, because discernment is “wisdom, and instruction, and understanding.” The Hebrew word for discern is “yada” which means to know, observation, care, recognition, instruction, be aware, comprehend, consider, perceive, regard, discover, be sure. (See Strong’s Concordance for a comprehensive definition). As you will notice, the word “judge” is not in the definition of the Hebrew word for discern. However, concerning judging, we read in John 7:24, *Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment.* In the Greek the definition of “judge” in this verse is “*Krino*” which means to distinguish, decide (mentally or judicially), to try, condemn, punish, to avenge, conclude, condemn, damn, decree, determine, esteem, call in question, sentence to, think. Since it is our LORD Himself who commanded us to “*judge righteous judgment*” then we need to obey Him, dig deeper than our popular platitudes, and realize that “judging” is not the problem. Rather, not knowing the difference between “righteous judgment” and “unrighteous judgment” is the issue.

The Old Testament priests were charged with the responsibility of teaching the people how to discern between the holy and the profane. Ezekiel 22:26 says, “*Her priests have violated my law, and have profaned mine holy things: they have put no difference between the holy and profane, neither have they shewed difference between the unclean and the clean, and have hid their eyes from my Sabbaths, and I am profaned among them.*” Again in Ezekiel 44:23 God says, “*And they shall teach my people the difference between the holy and profane, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean.*” [Emphasis added.] God’s people today also need to be taught how to discern between the holy and the profane; that is, between what is of God and what is not of God. The Holy Spirit is just that—HOLY! To claim that any unholy, ungodly, disorderly, bizarre confusing, perverted or unclean behavior, teaching, belief, book, movie, or practice is of the Holy Spirit is blasphemous.

What A. W. Tozer said about this may prove helpful. “Among the gifts of the Spirit scarcely one is of greater practical usefulness than the gift of discernment. This gift should be highly valued and frankly sought as being almost indispensable in these critical times. This gift will enable us to distinguish the chaff from the wheat and to divide the manifestations of the flesh from the operations of the Spirit.” We read in 1 Corinthians 2:14, 15, “*But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man.*” The Greek word for judge in this verse is a compound word, anakrinei (anakrino, an-ak-ree'-no) which means to scrutinize carefully in order to make a judgment. We are back to the same root word, krino, from John 7:24. A Christian is to exercise judgment (discernment) in all things.

The difference between righteous judgment (discerning) and unrighteous judgment (condemning) is basically this: Righteous judgment is in line with God’s will, His Spirit, and the truth of His Word, whereas unrighteous judgment stems from the wrong intentions (spirit), with the wrong motives, for the wrong purpose. Righteous judgment, perception or discernment, is judging, classifying, understanding, knowing, proving and applying wisdom to a person or persons, situation or matter to determine what spirit is in operation. Jesus told His disciples, “*Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves*” Matthew 10:16.

It never ceases to amaze us how rare it is to find the gift of discernment, or even the desire to discern among Christians even though 1 John 4:1 is very clear that it is vital that we “*believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.*” “Try” means to test, discern, or examine. How to test, try, examine, or discern the spirit behind a person or persons, religions, movements, teachings,

books, movies, songs, agendas, causes, churches, prophecies, etc. is a big subject, but one that we all need to give heed to.

First, keep in mind that the Bible tells us, "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith: prove your own selves" 2 Corinthians 13:5a. Therefore, before we examine the sliver in another person's eye, we are to make sure that: Christ is in us; we are truly born again and are led by His Spirit; our own causes, agendas and dogmas are out of the way, (thus guaranteeing pure motives); our hearts are right before God (clear conscience); pride is put down (walking in humility); our service or ministry to others is for their benefit and God's glory, not our own; and that we are fully submitted, and obedient to the will of the Lord as revealed in Scripture and by the Holy Spirit. In addition, we need to be honest with ourselves as to just how much we love the world. Scripture tells us plainly, "*Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world*" 1 John 2:15, 16. Furthermore, listen to what others, including you, talk about. If a person continually emphasizes "me, myself, and I" all the livelong day, in every meeting, or every time he or she has a captive audience, it is easy to perceive that his or her affections and priorities are grossly misdirected. *Colossians 3:1-3* admonishes, "*If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.*"

It is important to note that those who find it easy to judge the "sliver in a person's eye" and feel quite confident about it often do so through the lens of their own dogmatic set of "religious rules and philosophy." The more dogmatic a person is to his or her narrow belief system, the more enslaved he or she becomes in trying to defend it, or persuade others to line up to it. Dogma sets you up to fall because it is a matter of your own understanding and thinking, which has

usually been pounded into you by others and not from direct revelation of the Word of God by the Holy Spirit. Sound doctrine, on the other hand, is about Spirit and truth, not about your personal opinion which is a matter of pride. Jesus said to be careful about how we hear things. (Note: Not everything is "doctrine." Doctrine is directed towards our responsibility as Christians, and how we are to respond to the Word and live an obedient Christian life. Doctrine is instruction in what we are to do as God's people.) People who operate from the confining premise of dead-letter dogma, while defining it as "doctrine," are greatly hindered in their ability to properly discern the spirit behind something (the spirit of truth and the spirit of error) due to the "board of dogma" in their own eye.

Thus, dogma sets a person up to be rigid and inflexible, even to the point that when Scriptures are introduced that refute, enlarge, correct, challenge, or add another dimension to his or her narrow and confining belief he or she will instantly put up a wall. This is where dogma can become dangerous, and lead to error, for when it is challenged with Scriptures that don't support it, the person confined to his or her dogma will quickly revert to bending, twisting, or redefining what the Bible plainly states to somehow "fit" into his or her belief. When this is allowed to continue within a body of believers, those who possess discernment will eventually depart.

Because dogmatic religious conclusions lack Spirit and Truth, they also lack power and authority. "*Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty*" 2 Corinthians 3:17. There is no liberty in the Spirit when a person is confined to his or her dogma, and, tragically, there will be no spiritual growth, or lasting fruit. Dogma prevents a believer from "going on to perfection" (spiritual maturity), hinders his or her ability to properly teach the Word or minister in the Spirit to others and it produces a "dead-letter" environment that grieves and hinders the Holy Spirit, obstructs inquiring minds who would know Jesus and the depths of His Word in greater ways, and deprives the Church of a living, vibrancy that draws both saint and sinner to God. Dogma is spiritual death. *Hebrews 5:12-14* plainly states,

"For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. 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."

Jesus came to give us life and that more abundantly. Therefore, we need to go beyond the narrow confines of dogma by allowing the Holy Spirit to reveal the living Christ to us daily. Think of it this way: Dogma is like pattering around in a little familiar mud puddle day after day, week after week, month after month, and year after year, when just feet away flows a clear, fresh spring of water that once entered into, and followed will lead on to broader waterways and streams, all flowing to the same great destination, until you finally enter into a vast, deep, wide, flowing river of life that will feed your spirit for eternity.

Certain Pharisees and scribes (but not all of the Pharisees or scribes) of Jesus' day present a vivid picture of how dogma works. Jesus was the fulfillment of the Law, the Prophet that Moses spoke of, the fulfillment of hundreds of prophecies, He was their Creator and Messiah standing in their midst as the Son of God, the Resurrection and the Life, the Healer, the Bread of Life, the Light of the World, the Way, the Truth, and the Life, the Giver of Living Water, and the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Yet their rigid, narrow-minded religious dogmas blinded them to the Living Word among them just as our confining, dead-letter dogmas (that we defiantly defend and cling to as "doctrine") blinds us to Spirit and Truth, leaving us mildewing in mundane Christianity. And then we wonder why people around us aren't drawn to Jesus!

Jesus didn't try to be "apologetic" or "politically correct" and pussyfoot around with those religious leaders who were hypocritical. Instead, he went straight to the root of their hypocrisy as recorded in *Matthew* chapter 23. In verse 24 He not only ex-

posed their duplicity, but aptly summarized how dogmatism works in the Church when He exclaimed, “*Ye blind guides, which strain at [out] a gnat, and swallow a camel.*” [Addition added.] While this Scripture has different applications, it can also be a powerful key to discerning hypocrisy in those who lust after positions of authority or who crave positions of importance in the Church. What we need to discern is when such people can and do “strain at a gnat” when they continually emphasize their own pet peeves, ideas, conclusions, and exalt popular (heretical) teachers and teachings, unscriptural books, church practices, and the like that have nothing whatsoever to do with the Lord Jesus or a person’s salvation. The “camel” they have blindly swallowed in their self-delusion is their own pride, and self-importance while displaying ignorance of the whole counsel of God. As a point of interest: “*From Calmet’s Dictionary of the Holy Land / Gnat; 1823.*) You Jews take great pains to avoid offence in very small matters, superstitiously observing the smallest points of the law, like a man carefully straining out the animalcule from what he drinks, while you are at no pains to avoid great sins - hypocrisy, deceit, oppression, and lust - like a man who should swallow a (unclean) camel.” For an interesting explanation of *Matthew 23:24*, see: http://www.ancientbiblehistory.com/facts/gnats_camels.html

The blindness of dogmatism leads to another stumbling block found among Christians that most people not only fail to discern, but refuse to touch with a 50’ pole, and that is church, or denominational traditions. Jesus said, “*Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition. Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men*” *Matthew 15:6b-9*. No wonder there are so many different denominations and offshoots of Christianity! The truth is, there is only one true Church, and that is many-membered Church which is the Body of Christ. What a glorious,

wonderful privilege it is to be in Christ, and He in us as a part of His Body. How comforting to know that Jesus, not man, not an organization, not traditions nor dry dogma is our Head. How liberating to be led by the Spirit, follow the Spirit, and live in the Spirit who leads us into all truth!

How about you? Are you still struggling to follow man’s traditions, talk man’s talk, live by man’s dogma, think what you are told to think, or have you discerned the difference between truth and error, what is of man and what is of God? My prayer is that you will seek the Lord for discernment, wisdom, truth and find liberty in the Spirit! †



WORDS OF WIT & WISDOM From Vance Havner

“Civilization reminds me of an ape playing with a blowtorch in a room full of dynamite. We’re living in a day of guided missiles and misguided men, and in America we have painted ourselves into a corner. . . . The experts have all the answers, but they don’t even know what the question is. Our machinery has gotten ahead of our morals, and science doesn’t have the answer to sin. And our problem today is what it’s always been—sin. Science doesn’t have an answer for that. . . . The preacher Ben Haden said, ‘Right will always be right even if nobody does it, and wrong will always be wrong even if everybody does it, because God does not change. The Scripture cannot be broken.’ . . . It’s about time for God to work in America to straighten out the iniquities and the iniquities of this Sodom and Gomorrah. It’s time for God to bring to judgment a generation that’s laughed in His face, pronounced Him dead, denied His Word, disowned His Son, and turned His holy day into a holiday. It’s time for God to show up these ‘blind leaders of the blind’ (see *Matt. 15:14*), some of whom are in pulpits. . . . You have a date with deity and an appointment with the Almighty. You may not have it in your little book, but it’s in His. You’ve got a date coming up with God. . . . ‘It is time for God to work, it is time to seek the Lord. Break up your fallow ground’ (See *Hos. 10:12*).”

TO EVERY MAN HIS WORK

Mark 13:34

“The Lord has given to every man his work. It is his business to do it, and the devil’s business to hinder him-if he can. So, sure as God gives a man a work to do, Satan will try to hinder him. He may present other things more promising; he may allure you by worldly prospect; he may assault you with slander, torment you with false accusations, set you to work defending your character, employ pious persons to lie about you, editors to assail you, and excellent men to slander you. You may have Pilate and Herod, Ananias and Caiaphas all combined against you, and Judas standing by to sell you for 30 pieces of silver. And you may wonder why all these things have come to pass. Can you not see that the whole thing is brought about through the craft of the devil, to draw you off from your work and hinder your obedience to Christ? Keep about your work. Do not flinch because the lion roars. Do not stop to stone the devil’s dogs. Do not fool around your time chasing the devil’s rabbits. Do your work; let liars lie; let sectarians quarrel; let editors publish; let the devil do his worst. But see to it that nothing hinders you from fulfilling the work God has given you He has not sent you to make money; He has not commanded you to get rich. He has never bidden you to defend your character nor has He bidden you to contradict falsehoods about yourself which Satan and his servants may start to peddle. If you do these things you will do nothing else; you will be at work for yourself and not for the Lord. Keep about your work. Let your aim be as steady as a star. Let the world brawl and bubble. You may be assaulted, wrangled, insulted, slandered, wounded, and rejected. You may be chased by foes, abused by them, forsaken by friend, despised and rejected of men, but see to it that with steadfast determination and with unflinching zeal you pursue that great purpose of your life and the object of your being until at last you can say; “I have finished the work which you, dear God, have given me to do?”

Pulpit Helps, August, 1992, p. 8

RAYOLA'S Q & A CORNER

GOD'S JUDGMENTS ON NATIONS

Q: *"I believe God's judgments are hitting America, but some people don't agree. Is Israel the only nation God judges?"*

A: The Bible is clear that God eventually judges all nations. We have the ruin of great civilizations to verify the fact that God judges wicked cities, nations, and empires. We read the judgments that fell on Egypt when Israel was being held in bondage. You have the various prophets of the Old Testament declaring the different judgments that would fall upon the wicked cities and nations. One of those examples is Jonah and the great city of Nineveh, while Jeremiah prophesied against Babylon. You have Jesus speaking of the future judgment on nations in *Matthew 25* where He separates the sheep from the goats.

Much of the judgment that befalls leaders and nations hinges on how they treat the nation of Israel. If you read the book, *Eye to Eye* by William Koenig you will see that political crises that have challenged this nation along with storms such as Katrina coincide with America's bad policies concerning Israel. If you study the history of America such as, *The Light and the Glory*, by Peter Marshall and David Manuel, you will find that those of Christian heritage were occasionally plagued by drought like Israel was when they became casual about God, and went through times of examination and repentance to ensure God's blessings once again.

As to whether America is now tasting judgment, all you have to do is study how God handled wicked nations. To me the cup of iniquity is not only full from the various rampant affronts against marriage such as sexual immorality and pornography, as well as attacks against the family and the legacy of God with the murder of millions of aborted babies, but it must now be overflowing with the latest Supreme Court decision concerning gay marriage. No doubt a "Pandora's box" has been opened for various other wicked infidels to declare their right to have multiple wives or freely practice every type of immorality such as

pedophilia.

As Christians in America, up until now we have had the luxury of living in a world where America appears to be immune from God's righteous judgment on wickedness. However, we have no idea how wicked our nation is and how He looks at it. As a nation, we have crossed over a line and opened a dam that will not be stopped other than by God judging America and bringing people to their knees. However, our consolation is that God is not through with people.

The Bible shows us as a righteous Judge He will send judgment, but there is a clear pattern in how He does it. There are three phases of judgment. The first one is warning. God warns people of the terrible consequences that will befall them if they do not repent of their wicked ways. This goes for nations as well.

The second phase of judgment is that of separation. When people start paying the harsh consequences, that is when they will either turn back to God to once again consider who He is and their ways, or they will become more defiant and continue down a destructive path. The first judgment is to wake us up, while the second judgment forces us to face the harsh reality of wickedness.

The final phase is God's wrath. By this time man has been given various opportunities to turn from his wicked ways and turn back to God, but he has continued on in his stiff-necked ways. As a result, God unleashes His full-blown anger.

Christians will be spared from tasting His wrath, but when it comes to national judgment, they will experience the first two phases of judgment as the rest of the people. These phases will involve some type of loss because the sun shines on the wicked as well as the righteous and the rain falls on the righteous as well as the wicked. When a nation is being judged, the righteous will also taste it but the difference is they will know who to turn to, to find guidance and consolation. In such times faith will be tested and enlarged but it is an opportunity for them to experience a greater depth of God's love, grace, and faithfulness in a way that only such trials would produce, as well as become a living witness to those around them. †

THE NATIONS THAT FORGET GOD

"The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God." - Psalm 9:17

"For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken....Then shall the LORD go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle." - Zechariah 14:2a, 3

"He shall judge among the heathen, he shall fill the places with the dead bodies; he shall wound the heads over many countries." - Psalm 110:6

"Let the heathen be wakened, and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat: for there will I sit to judge all the heathen round about." - Joel 3:12

"And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." - Isaiah 2:4

God's covenant with Abraham: *"And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." - Genesis 12:3*

"I will also gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat, and will plead with them there for my people and for my heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations, and parted my land." - Joel 3:2

"That the land spue not you out also, when ye defile it, as it spued out the nations that were before you." - Leviticus 18:28

"And the land is defiled: therefore I do visit the iniquity thereof upon it, and the land itself vomiteth out her inhabitants." - Leviticus 18:25

"And you shall not walk in the customs of the nation, which I cast out before you: for they committed all these things, and therefore I abhorred them." - Leviticus 20:23

"But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be." - Matthew 24:37

THE NIGHT IS FALLING

By Matt Ward

The focus of everybody's attention is on the recent Supreme Court decision over gay marriage. It really is a perverse juxtaposition. The Middle East is on the brink of self-destruction and the entire world wide economy is about to self-implode. Life for everybody on this earth could get drastically worse very quickly, yet the issue which occupies all the attention is gay marriage. Why?

The real motivation in this decision is not perhaps what it seems. The real issue here is not to win equality in marriage for gay people, as so many believe. The real agenda here, and it is a satanic one, is to marginalize Christians. That is why this is being celebrated so widely and why, despite the plethora of other more important events and issues around the world, it occupies such a place of prominence. The real agenda here is to put Christians in a position where they are finally legally exposed if they follow and practice their faith. The endgame is "to get" Christianity.

The desired outcome is not to liberalize and bring equality for gay people; the desired outcome is to put Christianity directly within the cross hairs so that its adherents can be proactively attacked and persecuted.

If you live in the United States of America and you are a Bible believing Christian you woke up in late June criminalized. If your desire is to live your life in a way pleasing to your Savior, then hard times are ahead; you and your beliefs have been rejected by the legal system of your country.

The repercussions of this judgment will be far reaching. People write often, men and women that I respect, about the possibilities of national repentance and the spirit being poured out once again upon us. People better than I believe that if we would just turn our hearts back to God, then even now He would forgive us as a nation. With all my heart I wish that this were true but in reality, I simply don't believe that it is possible anymore.

There is no coming back from what has just happened.

What has taken place is an absolute affront to God. God ordained marriage as a covenant between one man and one woman. It is a picture of Jesus Christ's relationship with His Bride. This decision fundamentally corrupts God's will for mankind and it mocks Him.

This decision is a very deep offense to the nature of God. Even the rainbow colors, which are the symbol of the Pride movement, is purposely offensive and insulting to God. It is designed specifically

to cause God offense. These are the colors which symbolize God's deliverance of mankind from a time of evil the likes of which this earth had not seen before.

A rainbow even surrounds the holy throne of God Himself. This rainbow, a symbol of deliverance, has now become corrupted and twisted, now in our time a symbol of sin and rebellion, the symbol of the Pride movement.

As I write this my heart is very unsettled within me. I am deeply troubled spiritually by what has happened. When we look at the biblical example of Sodom and Gomorrah, we need to understand that these cities were not destroyed until the leadership of these places actively mandated a homosexual lifestyle. With this decision America finds itself in an identical situation to Sodom and Gomorrah. God loves mankind, deeply and desperately. He loves us so much that He has told us what is good for us and what is bad through His Word. He cares for us to such a huge extent that He has actually put Himself in the place of our execution. God Himself stands directly in our stead on our behalf.

God loves humanity, each and every person within it. Yet it is because of this love that God will ultimately allow each person and nation to decide for themselves what they think is good. If a nation chooses friendship with God then He will come and make his home with that nation. If a nation chooses to walk away from God and follow its own path, God will allow it.

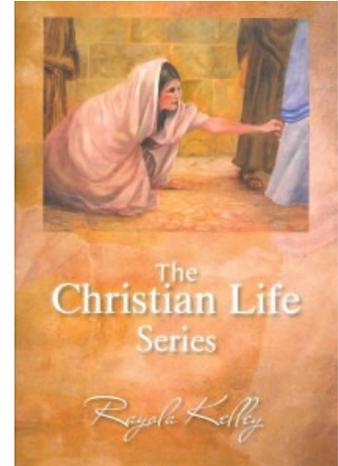
This decision means that America has chosen enmity with God. There will be consequences for it. For those of you who will hold to Jesus and His testimony, you are now marginalized, set apart. Even though I genuinely believe that as the bride of Christ we will not see the wrath of God come upon this world, I do believe, especially in light of this decision, that we will see persecution. From this moment on we will never be as free as we once were in our faith. We will be systemically harassed. I believe that there will be a brief pause now, a moment of calm while people and forces take stock of what has happened and what it means. Then will come the outright persecution. You are in the cross hairs. You have been warned.

Attend to your God and His Son and be about His work. The night is coming when it is not possible to work. In fact, I think that dusk has already begun to settle on this fallen world.

Matt Ward is a free-lance writer commenting on current issues and Bible prophecy. He can be contacted at Ward-matt1977@gmail.com.

The Christian Life Series

by Rayola Kelley



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