

GENTLE SHEPHERD MINISTRIES

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

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Discernment 3 Falling Away By Rayola Kelley

We have been considering discernment. In a world where deception abounds, counterfeits seem to rule unabated, and truth is becoming scarce, discernment is greatly needed. Jesus and many of the New Testament writers warned of such counterfeits, especially in the end days, but in today's world it seems that Christians are not concerned about the many warnings surrounding the end days. They act as if they could never be deceived; therefore, in their mind, the warning is always directed at the other guy.

The problem is that people who are casual about end-day warnings have already fallen into the trap of deception, or are about to be deceived. The reason is because they do not soberly apply the Scriptural warnings to their own life. They not only walk in denial about being in deception, but in unbelief towards the warnings in Scripture about the strong delusion that will be present in the end days (2 Thessalonians 2:11). This delusion will test Christians as to their attitude towards truth.

I was saved out of a cult and I know how easy it is to fall into some type of deception. Due to our fallen state we are bent towards a reality that will easily fit into our narrative about God, life, and the judgment to come. The Apostle Paul actually describes the state that will be evident in the last days in *2 Timothy 4:3-4*, "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears: And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables."

When Jeannette and I were ministering in the Seattle area we encountered many fables being present-

ed as truth to Christians. In fact, it was like a spiritual smorgasbord where Christians had a variety of foods to choose from, but some of it was clearly laced with heretical poison.

The problem is that most Christians partaking of the smorgasbord are not concerned about the quality of it or whether it was laced with death. If they didn't like a particular doctrine, then they could continue on down the line and find something that would tickle their fancy. They could do their religious duty as they partook of the wretched food, while holding onto some fanciful notion about God without realizing that if truth is perverted, twisted, and tainted, a person will ultimately come out believing a fable in the end, and think it to be the truth.

The question is why do people prefer deception over truth? There are a couple of reasons. The first one is people are bent towards the darkness of deception because it hides their real preference for that which serves their selfishness (*John 3:19-21*). Everything in fallen man is motivated by selfishness, which is self-serving, prideful, clever or tyrannical about getting its way, and is just plain spoiled about demanding its so-called "rights" to have life on its terms. The problem is a person cannot really discern anything when he or she is making a matter about how it will affect self. Selfishness can be easily bribed, perverting any real sound judgment. It swings from the heights of unfounded suspicion about a matter only to land on the deceptive runway of presumption to confirm its foolish notions. It is always watching out for its own interests. As long as something makes self feel and look good, moral rightness and clarity will not be the determining factor where it is concerned. Devoid of moral clarity (righteousness), self can only judge a matter based on the impression that is being made on its fragile ego; therefore, it is incapable of being able to discern something for what it is.

In Christians, unabated selfishness will produce half-heartedness towards God. This half-heartedness is the basis for treason in the kingdom of God. Self-centered Christians will play around with religion while watching for any "ship" of worldly options that will offer them a better deal down the line, at which time, some like Demas, will naturally jump ship to pursue their selfish, worldly desires (*2 Timothy 4:10*).

Selfishness also does not care about what is true, and is ever ready to feed, cater to, or play with the selfishness of others to come out on top.

It wants its pride worshipped, its fears bowed down to, its insecurities catered to, its standards honored, and its ways and demands served. It is for this reason that the Apostle Paul made it clear in *Romans 7:18* that there is no good thing in the flesh; in other words, works and activities that originate from the flesh are unclean and unacceptable to God.

Behind selfishness is the natural spirit of man (*1 Corinthians 2:14*). Those who have a spirit of discernment will be able to discern if the natural spirit is trying to run or oversee spiritual matters. It's for this reason that Christians who have discernment are not appreciated by the church in general. They will either put up a mirror to the natural spirit or throw a wrench into the waters where the spirit of the world is in operation, causing a disturbance that is resented. Stirring the water or shaking the tree will most likely wake up any "sleeping dogs" that are content with matters remaining in the grey areas of worldly compromise. These Christians who desire peace more than truth also fail to realize that some "sleeping dogs" are wolves in sheep's clothing and they are lying in wait as they watch for the opportunity



to undermine the true work of God and promote their own personal causes (*Matthew 7:20; 2 Corinthians 4:2; Ephesians 4:14*).

This brings us to the second reason why people prefer deception. The apostle Paul talked about the falling away from the truth in *2 Thessalonians 2:3-12*. It is also referred to as becoming apostate. A big debate always follows when the word "apostate" is mentioned in regard to whether a Christian can fall away from the truth after knowing it. My concern is not who is right in the debate but whether a person is truly born again and understands the seriousness behind God's warnings. After all, the Apostle John gave this warning to the early Christians who were contending with the false gospel of Gnosticism in *1 John 3:9*, "*Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.*" If a person is truly born again, he or she will not walk in sin without great conviction nor will he or she easily buy a lie because the spirit in him or her will be alarmed or vexed.

When it comes to whether a Christian can become apostate, arguing over such a matter never changes the spiritual status of a person, and for me there are only two ways I can respond to such vain activity: God knows the hearts of people and He knows who are His heirs and how to preserve them in such grave times. Meanwhile, His Word in *2 Thessalonians 2* clearly warns its readers that to fall away from the truth simply means a person did not love or prefer it in the first place.

It is clear that we must choose to love the truth. It doesn't matter if it goes against the grain of what we think, believe, or feel, if we truly love the truth it is because we love the Living Word, Jesus, and we want to do that which pleases Him and not fulfill our own selfish designs and claims.

In *2 Corinthians 11:3-4*, the Apostle Paul stated this concern, "*But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if he that comes preacheth another Jesus whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which*

ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him."

The apostle was clear that Christians can easily be taken captive by delusion. The reason why Christians can be taken captive is because Satan is behind all deception. He is the father of lies (*John 8:44*). Since Satan is behind delusion, the first thing we as believers must recognize is that the battle over truth and for our minds is a spiritual battle, not an educational battle where logic, degrees, religious knowledge, and intelligence are involved in assessing and overcoming a conflicting spiritual debate, issue, or matter.

We are told to discern or test the spirit behind all matters (*1 John 4:1*). It is important to remind Christians that the letters in the New Testament are not written to unbelievers but to believers. They are there for our edification, which involves instructions, encouragement, warnings, and exhortation. The Apostle Paul is very clear that Satan can beguile us as he did Eve in the Garden of Eden. If you look up the word "beguile," in the Strong's Concordance, it means to "seduce wholly."

To seduce one means that the victim's reality is being completely turned upside down. In such a seduction, the person may know something is not right, but he or she finds self being pulled into some vortex the individual has no power over. Even though the person may be struggling to keep his or her sense of reality, the individual will find him or herself eventually succumbing to the all-consuming deceptive idea or image that has been created by the seduction.

For example, in *Genesis 3*, it appeared that Eve had ignored the tree of knowledge of good and evil, but at the right time her attention was drawn to it. The serpent was patiently waiting for the right opportunity to tempt her. One day when she was innocently walking by the tree, it provided the opportunity for the serpent to beguile her. Through subtlety, the cunning intrusion of doubt, the crafty denial about the consequences, and the trickery of bringing accusation against God's true intention, the tree became magnified in her eyes. It was no long-

er just the forbidden tree; rather, it became THE TREE that could honor the desire that had suddenly been awakened in her curiosity and erected in her being. The fruit which probably at first appeared like the other fruit in the garden, suddenly became more beautiful to her and the possibilities it offered were enormous, causing all remaining sensibility and reason to fly out the window.

The truth about the tree was replaced with a false reality, but to Eve the lie was the absolute truth. Her mind was convinced of it, her will primed to replace all reason with presumption, and her emotions were heightened to euphoric proportions as she considered the possibilities of knowing what God knows. There was no aspect of her soul that had not been seduced and taken captive, and it all started with a small doubt that gave Satan the opening to confuse the real issue by dousing all concerns about possible consequences in her mind, while opening her up to partake of the deadly fruit to satisfy the deep hole of expectation that had been dug by his lies.

Because of seduction Eve ended up viewing God's commands, warning, and promise from the premise of Satan's lies. The Apostle Paul stated the end result of Eve's seduction in *2 Corinthians 11:3*, "*so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.*" Eve's mind was corrupted by the seduction. With the simplicity of God's command clouded over, Eve's mind found itself in major confusion. After all, God only entrusted man with one command, but the real issue of obedience became lost to Eve in the seduction as the idea of gaining divine insight was magnified.

This is the problem with the mind that is corrupt. It filters things through a worldly perspective and judges matters according to personal standards. Such a mind ends up being confused and plagued by perverted conclusions that are devoid of Spirit and truth.

Satan is the master of deception and seduction, yet man thinks that he has the ability to reason with the doubts the enemy plants according to his understanding, silence his clever lies with carnal logic, and outsmart Satan with his own trickery. However, Satan is greater when it comes to

man's ability to confront and overcome him. Man will always be on the losing end no matter how smart or clever he thinks he is.

To overcome Satan one must understand how he works. Seduction is a type of blanket that is thrown over the mind so that it cannot clearly view a matter. For example, Satan went after Eve's reasoning by planting a doubt right in the middle of it, "*Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?*" Consider the question. He was not pointing the tree out up front, but he was weaving a trap that would put confusion in her mind about what she understood to be true.

It you consider Eve's response you will realize she tried to set the record straight. This was her first error, she did not have to explain or defend what God commanded; she simply needed to obey it. Instead of trying to reason with the devil, she should have fled the devil. This is true for Christians. Christians must not give the devil audience, and they do not need to defend the Word when it comes to Satan because he knows the Word better than most Christians. He knows it so well he can cleverly twist it, but what Christians need to do is believe what they know is true and separate themselves from any environment that promotes or declares otherwise.

At first Eve's reasoning was clear as she stated that they could eat of all of the trees in the garden except the tree in the midst of the garden, but she went on to say they were not to even touch it. The last statement is a bit of addition to God's command. He never commanded them not to touch the tree. Any addition to a command of God will end in confusion, which serves as an open door for the deceiver to sow doubt in regard to what is true. Those who know how to discern will always come back to what God said in the first place, allowing the simplicity of God's truth to establish a matter as being so.

Each lie led Eve further away from the center of truth. As she backslid into greater seduction, she was unable to discern what was happening to her. Satan's lies started with a question, but the ultimate lie that she could be like God, became a pos-

sibility in her mind, corrupting what was happening, and ending with the lie becoming her reality. As the Apostle Paul pointed out *1 Timothy 2:14*, "*And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression.*"

God's simple but profound truths lie at the center of all true discernment. Because of lies people slide away from the truth as their minds become corrupt with deception, while others fall away from the truth because they desire to have life and reality on their terms. Those who slide away from the truth are backsliders, but those who fall away from the truth because they prefer their desired reality over the truth are the ones who end up going apostate.

I have met many backsliders lurking in the darkness of guilt and despair over their life and I have read about and met a few apostates who walked away from the truth because they were not anchored to the Rock and they did not love the truth. One such man was Karl Marx.

As Christians we need to recognize the devices that Satan used on Eve in the garden. They haven't changed, but we need to decide to love the truth, love God with everything in us, and possess Him regardless of what it will cost us. We need to know how to stand on the true foundation of Jesus, withstand the affronts of Satan in the Spirit of God, and continue to stand against all lies with God's Word, remembering that the battle has already been won on the cross.

The Bible is clear; we need to know those who labor among us. If there is one who possesses discernment, we need to soberly listen to that person, test what the person says, and if it lines up to both the Spirit of God and His Word, we need to heed his or her words of instruction, warning, and exhortation for our protection and spiritual well-being. ✚

VANCE HAVNER QUOTES

"If you are what you've always been, you are not a Christian. A Christian is a new creation."

"We build expensive churches and sometimes it is like erecting million-dollar launching pads to send up firecrackers."

"HODGE PODGE" OF BELIEFS AMONG BORN-AGAINS

Onenewsnow.com, 5/30/17, [Excerpts](#)

A recent survey by the American Culture & Faith Institute finds that only 30 percent of born-again adults have a biblical worldview. According to that survey, almost 90 percent of them describe God as the "all-knowing, all-powerful creator and ruler of the universe"—but only one in four believes "as sinners, people are not basically good." Sixty-three percent believe someone can earn their own way to heaven.

As Barna summarizes the findings: "The born-again population maintains a combination of biblically accurate and indefensible beliefs"—and based on previous research, he says that "hodge podge of beliefs" isn't unexpected.

[A] Christian apologist and educator [notes] that... "even people within the church who might have some biblical beliefs about Jesus, beneath the surface you find that they're almost Universalists—believing that all people go to heaven." According to the survey, only 40 percent of born-again believers think success is defined by obedience and commitment to Christ. The implication... is that the world's definition of success is dominant among Christ-followers.

He says the church needs a dose of frank preaching and biblical teaching. "Before you can get someone saved, sometimes you have to get them lost, in that you have to help people understand that they are a sinner in need of a Savior..." he explains."

STRONGLY STATED By Kenneth D. Butcher

"Whenever a person, office or institution is interposed between the conscience and Christ you have the principle of popery."

"Only the headship rule of Jesus will save us from the rule of law on the one hand or lawlessness on the other."

"It is only under the authority of the Head that the church can ever be what God purposed her to be."

DEVIL'S FOOD By Jeannette Haley

*“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour”
--1 Peter 5:8*

One of the things I dearly loved to indulge in before I became gluten intolerant was Devil's Food cake. How could anything so rich and delicious have anything to do with the devil? Then again, the temptation that accompanies a luxury such as Devil's Food cake with its rich, dark chocolate frosting and all of its sugary calories and moist, mouthwatering deep flavor is enough to dissolve the resolve of the most resolute resister.



Of course not everybody is a “chocoholic.” (What’s wrong with those people?) Some folks would much prefer to snack on deviled eggs. We had a friend years ago who used to protest the name “deviled eggs” and called them “angel eggs.” Either way, they are what they are, and one thing is for certain, they aren’t chocolate!

All kidding aside, we can call our food whatever we choose to call it, and I’ve taken some creative liberties in that area myself, but when it comes to the real devil (which I wrote about in the May newsletter) we Christians are his “favorite dish.” If the devil had a recipe book it would be all about the many ways to tempt, trip up, trap, and toast Christians, subtly turning their hearts from Jesus, destroying their testimony and bringing a reproach on the Gospel. If temptation is his bait, then lies are his hook, and once a person takes the “bait” and gets “hooked,” the next step is—you guessed it—being “cooked.”

The word sober in 1 Peter 5:8 means to be discreet, and to watch. The meaning of the word devour in the Greek is chilling. It means “to drink down, to gulp entire, drown, swallow up.” (Remember Jonah?) In other words, when a nominal Christian through negligence, disobedience, unbelief, double-mindedness, insincerity, foolishness, flippancy, compromise, worldliness, idolatry, pride, sin, and

rebellion becomes the devil’s food it is a total descent into a deep, dark pit of captivity from top to bottom.

“But,” someone protests, “I’m a Christian. The devil can’t touch me.” That’s a sentimental statement, a popular platitude, a coy copout; however, it’s only one side of the coin—a half-truth. The truth is the devil can’t swallow a truly born again Christian who is sober, actively vigilant and watchful, alert while standing and withstanding the enemy’s advances and temptations, and walking close to the Lord in faith and obedience. *1 Peter 5:9* is written to Christians, not unbelievers, and concerning the enemy warns, “*Whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.*” One of the damaging doctrines “easy believism” promotes is that once you have “accepted” Jesus and repeated after someone “the sinner’s prayer” that you are immediately exempt from becoming “devil’s food” because now you are “saved.” Bottom line, saved or unsaved, a person never gives up their free will. A Christian can sail on the church ship for decades, and still choose to “jump ship” for whatever reason suits their unregenerate agendas or causes. This is why the Apostle Paul said, “I die daily” *1 Corinthians 31:15b*, and contended with the churches to become rooted, grounded and grow up into Christ.

Suffering, afflictions, and temptations are big topics of discussion and debate, and we need to be wise concerning certain facts and problematic experiences we are going to go through simply because we are in these mortal bodies of clay in a fallen world. Suffering can be brought on because we reap what we sow; some afflictions are for the sake of Christ and for God’s glory. Suffering works compassion in us which enables us to enter in with others. There are times when we simply have to let go of our dependency on worldly options and fall into the loving hands of our merciful God, believing in faith that He will take care of us, trusting Him through it all.

Patient Job teaches us that suffering and affliction can also be caused by a direct attack from Satan, even upon a dedicated servant of

God. *Job 1:8* says, “*And the LORD said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?*” The attack Job experienced was not because he had ceased to be vigilant, ceased to watch, or carelessly opened up a door through lack of faith or sin by which Satan gained an entrance. God allowed Satan to afflict Job because He knew that His servant Job would stand and never falsely accuse or blaspheme His name. In the end God was exalted, Job was restored, his friends were shamed, the devil defeated, and for generations to come God’s servants and suffering saints were given the powerful recorded message of the reality of Satan, the sovereignty of God, and overcoming faith. Job was not the “devil’s food” because he deliberately refused to cast off his faith, refused to falsely accuse God, and refused to delude himself so he could find an excuse to live in unbelief, sin, and debauchery. He was proof to Satan that God had a man who would never give up his integrity before the Lord, even if it meant his destruction. Can you honestly say with Job, “*Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: but I will maintain mine own ways before him*” *Job 12:15?*

Christians don’t like to think that God would allow Satan to touch their lives in such a fearful way; rather, it’s much more positive to blame Job for his experience (which is not what the Bible teaches) and conclude that after Jesus died on the cross the devil crawled under a rock somewhere in the Middle East and hasn’t been seen since. Another view is that he really doesn’t exist at all, and everything in the Bible about him is just a metaphor. Of course, such thinking can easily be challenged by asking questions such as the following: “If the devil doesn’t exist, then who tempted Adam and Eve?” “Who was God talking to in *Genesis 3:14, 15?* and *Job 1 and 2?*” “Why does the Bible say ‘*And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel*’ in *1 Chronicles 21:1* if Satan is just a symbol?” “How do you explain away *Matthew 4:1* that says, ‘*Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness*

to be tempted of the devil' and the temptation of Jesus in verses 3-11?" "Who was Jesus talking to, Himself?"

The question is why is the Church today so nonchalant and unconcerned when it comes to Satan and his wiles? Perhaps one answer is that belief in the existence of Satan by Protestant churches has dropped to less than 50% according to Barna Research. This is a strong indication that professing Christians are failing to search the Scriptures, believe what is written, and direct their lives accordingly. This is a dangerous place to be, and just as America has been (and still is) vulnerable to attack by committed Moslems who remain the "unnamed enemy" because their true goal specified in the Quran has not yet been publicly defined and revealed, so too failure to identify our enemy as revealed in God's Word makes us vulnerable "devil's food."

We are not saved to sit. Every believer is saved to preach (or share) the Gospel to all the world, saved to be the salt and the light of the world while making disciples, saved to grow in Christ, walking out what God works in us, and saved to run the race, and saved to glorify God. All of that means overcoming. Overcome what? The answer is we are commanded to overcome the world, the flesh, and the devil, "*the god of this world*". We are not saved to remain baby Christians, tender, weak little lambs that must be bottle-fed milk for the rest of our lives! We are to grow into an army of strong soldiers of the cross! We have an enemy to fight and overcome! "*Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier*" 2 Timothy 2:3, 4.

If you are one who has ignored what the Bible reveals about our enemy through a lack of proper discipleship, or willful ignorance and unbelief, here is a list of Scriptures for your convenience to prayerfully read, study and meditate upon:

1 Peter 5:8 - Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:

1 John 3:8 - He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from

the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. **2 Corinthians 11:14** - And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.

John 8:44 - Ye are of [your] father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.

James 4:7 - Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

John 10:10 - The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have [it] more abundantly.

2 Corinthians 11:3 - But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

Romans 16:20 - And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ [be] with you. Amen.

Revelation 12:9 - And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

Ephesians 4:27 - Neither give place to the devil.

Ephesians 6:11 - Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil

Revelation 12:9-12 - And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

Matthew 16:23 - But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.

Ephesians 6:12 - For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high [places].

2 Corinthians 4:4 - In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of

them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.

Luke 10:18 - And he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven.

1 John 5:19 - [And] we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.

God is explicit about our enemy, Satan, the father of lies, from the first book in the Bible to the last. If God didn't want us to know about our enemy, He wouldn't have exposed him, described him, and warned us about him in the Scriptures. This is just another indication of the apostasy of our time—people want to pick and choose what they want to believe out of the Word of God instead of taking to heart and believing what Jesus, the Living Word, said in *Matthew 4:4*, "*It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.*" It is natural for people to only want to hear and believe what appeals to their "itching ears" regardless of what the Bible proclaims is "The Way, the Truth and the Life." Anything that is not positive, entertaining, flattering or downright funny is dismissed as old-fashioned, gloom and doom, depressing, outdated, or irrelevant. The truth is the Bible (not a watered down perverted version) is more up to date than tomorrow's news. And, we have a very real, powerful, active enemy to overcome through Christ.

Temptation in and of itself doesn't make us the "devil's food." What can make us the "devil's food" is our decision, through pride, rebellion, and unbelief to refuse to take the way of escape God has provided; that is, His Word and Jesus Christ, which puts us in danger of being devoured. (See *1 Corinthians 10:13*.) Being watchful and vigilant of not only Satan's devices towards us outwardly, but also being watchful and vigilant inwardly of our own heart condition, and innermost thoughts and tendencies, whether they be evil imaginations, anger, secret sins, attitudes, lust, perversion, fornication, covetousness, unforgiveness, lack of love, self-exaltation, bitterness, or unthankfulness, etc. We need to guard against the lie that our "hang-ups," "mistakes,"

or “errors” are trite compared to the sins of others as we conveniently forget that our God is a holy God, and no sin whatsoever is acceptable in His sight. As soon as we allow the Holy Spirit to shed His light on anything that displeases the Lord, bringing conviction to our hearts in brokenness and true repentance, forsaking all that comes between us and our Lord, clinging to the old rugged cross, surrendering all to Jesus, then the devil has to flee.

Rayola and I have had the privilege and honor of discipling countless people through the years through Bible Studies, books, articles, newsletters, art, seminars, Internet, radio, television, in churches large and small, through personal investment, and the Discipleship Course which has gone to hundreds of pastors in Africa, and used by missionaries in several other countries. We take our commission very seriously, knowing that greater damnation is awaiting those who teach anything contrary to God’s Holy Word. (See *James 3:1*.) We have seen true, not counterfeit, salvations, deliverances, healings, and the power of God touch lives in ways that are becoming unheard of and unexperienced in most of the Church today. This deeply grieves our spirits, along with the sad fact that, as exemplified in the parable of the sower and the seed, only a small percentage (25 %) truly takes root, grows and bears fruit. *“Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” Matthew 7:14.*

God’s servants are touched by the sorrow that touches His heart, and one of the greatest heartbreaks that takes place is when a professing Christian becomes “devil’s food”—not just tripped up in some way and quickly repenting—but completely ensnared and overcome by sin such as lust, delusion, rebellion, and insane self-gratification that brings a reproach on the Gospel, and has the potential of destroying other lives. Such Christians have yet to obey *Colossians 3:1-4*, *“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. When Christ, who is our life, shall*

appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.” (The rest of chapter 3 specifies how to walk this out.) We have agonized in prayer while watching certain precious souls, because their affections were set on this world and consumed with youthful lust, delude themselves that it’s okay to walk in the ways of Balaam (fornication and idolatry) and still be on their way to heaven. Such people have bought the devil’s lie that God “wants them to be happy” and so therefore they are an “exception” to God’s Word which gives them the “right” to pursue Satan’s bait, swallow it hook, line and sinker as God gives them over to their depraved desires. Such people find themselves ensnared in a life of regret and misery, learning too late that nothing will end right that starts out wrong. Too late they realize that they have become the “devil’s food.”

The “way of escape” is ignored in such cases along with Scriptures such as *2 Timothy 2:22*, *“Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.”* Flee lust, and follow Jesus! It’s a lot easier to flee a burning building from the outside than from the inside! For those of us watching and praying for such a soul, God instructs us, *“And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will” 2 Timothy 24:-26.*

Will the Church of these end times take to heart the examples and warnings given by the Spirit to the seven churches in Revelation, which applies to the Church of today as well? Will the “Ephesus church” return to her first love, and abolish the Nicolaitane system that Jesus hates, and submit to Jesus as the sole Head of His church? Will they overcome? Will the “Smyrna church” be aware of what the devil is going to do to them and remain faithful unto death in tribulation? Will they overcome? Will the “Pergamos church” resist Satan, the doctrine of Balaam (fornication and idolatry) and the Nicolaitanes? Will

she overcome? Will the “Thyatira church” stand against false prophets, heresy and spiritual fornication, and the depths of Satan? Will they overcome? Will the “Sardis church” remember to watch, and remember how she *“received and heard, and hold fast, and repent”*? Will she overcome? Will the “Philadelphia church” continue to keep Jesus’ word, and not deny His name? Will they overcome, and watch for His coming? Will the lukewarm “Laodicean church” ever wake up, embrace God’s refining process, repent and overcome? These seven churches were not only individual churches, but together they are the embodiment of the Church in these end days. (How do we overcome Satan? See *Revelation 12:11*.)

Jesus’ warning to the seven churches is the same today, yet topics such as the devil, hell, cross-carrying, self-denial, overcoming (the world, the flesh, and the devil) and the judgment to come are not palatable to the average church goer. As fallen human beings, we all have a natural bent towards gaining the world, satisfying the appetites of the flesh, and either ignoring, denying or playing footsies with the devil. After all, this is considered to be “normal” these days, but as Rayola said, “The Christian who lives a normal life is a nominal Christian.”

Think about that for a while, and then ask yourself if you are “normal” in the eyes of both the world and the worldly church, but “nominal” in the eyes of God, and if so, realize that you are a prime candidate to become the “devil’s food.” †

GOD’S CONTINUAL DEW

By Herbert Lockyer

By nature our hearts are dead and but for the grace of God cannot manifest life, beauty, or fruit. Regeneration by the Holy Spirit requires God’s continual dew and the need to sing always, along with an unknown writer:

Come, Holy Ghost, as heavenly dew
My parched soul revive;
The former mercies now renew,
Quicken and bid me live:
Thy fertilizing power impart
And sanctify my barren heart.



RAYOLA'S Q & A CORNER

THE TRUTH ABOUT TITHING

Q: "I think we talked about this before, but...This business of giving 10% to the church and then plus, plus etc. Is that why I can't get my credit card paid off because I don't give enough?? Probably a stupid question. I know God says give and it shall be given, shaken down and over flowing. I hear so often give more and your problems will be over...it bothers me."

A: This is a struggle many Christians have when it comes to how much to give to the Lord's work. Tithing is an Old Testament practice, but the idea of 10 percent was a general figure and the Jews often gave more than a tenth of everything. However, you will not see Christ commanding that believers pay a certain amount for tithing in the New Testament. In fact, the Jews have not paid tithes since 70 A.D. because there is no temple or Levitical priesthood. The tithe was for the upkeep of the temple and the priesthood, but as we will see it was to be an avenue of blessing to others.

When you study tithing in relationship to the history of the Old Testament, it presents a different picture than the one that is being promoted by the present day religious leaders and churches. Tithing was a well-known practice before it was established in the Law of Moses. We know before tithing was addressed by Moses, Abraham gave Melchizedek a tenth of all the spoils that were collected after rescuing his nephew Lot from a warring army in *Genesis 14*, but ended up giving the remaining spoils to the king of Sodom. When the King of Sodom wanted him to take the goods for himself, Abram made an important statement, "I have lift up mine hand unto the LORD, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth, That I will not take from a thread even to a shoe latchet and that I will not take anything that is thine, lest the thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich" (*Genesis 14:22-23*). Abram knew who supplied him with his riches and blessings, and it was not man. Likewise, we as believers know, "But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches

in glory by Christ Jesus" (*Philippians 4:19*). Jacob also made a vow when he encountered Jehovah at Bethel that if the Lord brought him back to the land that he would give a tenth of his belongings to the Lord (*Genesis 28:20-22*)

When Moses divided the spoils of the Midianites in *Numbers 31:9, 27-29*, the priests received 1/500th of the spoil, while the Levites received 1/50th allotted to the congregation, which would be half of the spoils. This brings us to an important point; spoils were calculated outside of the 10 percent range. When it comes to Moses, he required that tithes be paid only on the increase of the land and animals and that a tenth of it had to be paid to the Levites. (*Leviticus 27:30-31*).

In *Exodus 13:35*, the Jews were to spoil Egypt upon their departure from it. These spoils would later be used to construct the tabernacle at Sinai. We see in *Exodus 36:3, 7* that when the Jewish people were called upon to offer free-will offerings for the construction of the tabernacle, they brought so much they had to be restrained from bringing any more (*Exodus 35:29; 36:6*). Moses' instructions about tithing did not come until a year later in *Leviticus 27:30-33*. It was clear that tithing was practiced before the Law of Moses, but Moses made it clear that tithing had nothing to do with money but had to do with seed crops and fruit trees along with every tenth animal. The only time money was given as a tithe was if the offering was not sufficient or was too poor to bring the proper offerings then a monetary amount would be set by the priest, and if the person wanted to redeem the offering to keep it for himself, he had to add 1/5 to the amount calculated by the priest.

If we consider what Moses established in regard to cattle for instance, the Jews were to tithe the tenth animal because it belonged to the Lord. This is important to note; tithing belonged to the Lord, not the tabernacle, the priests, or the Levites, but was to be distributed according to the Law of Moses. And, if we are reading this right, Jews tithed only on their increase because the first fruits of the land and the first males, which included the men and livestock, were already dedicated to the Lord (*Exodus*

13:2; 22:29). There is a difference between dedicating something and paying tithes. As Christians we are to present our bodies as living sacrifices up front and then commit all resources, not just money, but time and energy to the work of the Lord to ensure His will is carried out (*Romans 12:1-2*). Once again, it was the increase of the land and livestock that were to serve as an actual tithe, and according to Moses the tithes were not to be changed (*Leviticus 27:30-34*).

Before they entered the Promised Land, Moses ordered the Israelites to set aside ten percent of their agricultural and animal production each year, and then they were ordered to bring it to a central place—the tabernacle, later the temple (*Deuteronomy 14:22-24*). It was during this time that Moses allowed the tithes to be turned into money without the penalty of a fifth being added to it (*Deuteronomy 14:25*).

This brings us to another issue about tithing; it was only done once every year because it had to do with the reproduction cycle of crops and herds. The Jews were to fill the storehouse, which was located close to the temple with the tithings of the land (*Malachi 3:6-10*). If you study the subject of tithing even further, you will discover that when they entered the Promised Land the Levites received their portion of tithes every three years. Keep in mind, they were given plots of land where they were to live as a perpetual inheritance to them and their descendants, where they could take care of their own needs, while teaching the law to the people and serving them in various ways, but they would only receive tithes every three years (*Leviticus 25:34; Numbers 35:1-2; Deuteronomy 14:25-29*).

The question is where were the rest of the tithes to be used? We know they were to be used for the upkeep of the temple, and that the priests were allowed to partake of certain parts of the sacrifice, but they were also to be used during their different celebrations such as the Firstfruits so everyone could be part of the festival. When you consider *Deuteronomy 14:29*, you will see that the stranger, the fatherless and the widows were allowed to share in the

tithes with the Levites. It was clear that God blessed the Israelites so they could take care of those who served among them, but they were also responsible to lift the burden of the poor among them, not saddle them with demands they were unable to bear (*Deuteronomy 15:3-14*). We also see this in the practice of gleaning, that the harvesters were to leave some of it in the fields for the poor to gather (*Leviticus 19:9-10*).

If the preaching of tithes does not produce the desired results, religious leaders will often point out *Mark 12:41-44* about the widow who gave her last two mites. It is true the poor widow was willing to give her all to the Lord, trusting Him to provide her with her need. It is also important to point out that the widow was giving it to the Lord. To keep this in the right perspective, we must consider the previous Scriptures, *"Beware of the scribes, which love to go in long clothing, and love salutation in the market-places, And the chief seats in the synagogues, and the uppermost rooms at feasts: Which devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers: these shall receive greater damnation"* (*Mark 12:38b-40*). Being Jewish, this widow also knew that the Lord made provision for her through tithes and donations, and it was her way of giving back out of her need because she so loved and appreciated the Lord and his provision.

It is clear that many modern day preachers try to use the idea of tithing to shame people into giving, but if the church was truly practicing tithing, such giving would be an avenue in which the blessings of God would flow through the church, not just to the leaders but to the needy among them. Sadly, the way that many church leaders use this practice ends with the church becoming nothing more than a Dead Sea where leaders heap upon themselves, along with their church's causes, to purchase unnecessary new carpeting, pews, chairs, etc. to attract the world, with the offerings of others without any concern for, or addressing the needs of those whom they are to serve. And, those individuals with bountiful personal funds, who offer to pay for such things, need to ask the Lord where He wants their bounty to go while bearing

in mind that His heart is toward the poor and needy in the Body of Christ. Otherwise, the leaders end up putting undue burdens on those who should be receiving instead of being pressured to sacrifice what they don't have (*Galatians 6:1, 9-10*). In the Old Testament there was a serious warning put forth for those who oppress the strangers, widows, and fatherless, *"Thou shalt neither vex a stranger, nor oppress him: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt. Ye shall not afflict any widow, or the fatherless child. If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry; And my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword; and your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless"* (*Exodus 22:21-24*). The responsibility towards widows (this includes single women who are in distress) was practiced by the New Testament Church as well. (See Acts 6:1). In *James 1:27*, we read *"Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."*

The few religious leaders who do understand the real principle behind God's blessings and offerings realize that the blessings they receive in the way of donations are a great test to them. They understand that the church is to be an avenue in which to pour blessings out to those among them that are in real need.

I remember years ago on a Sunday visiting one of the fastest growing churches in Everett, Washington. I noted that there were a great variety of people attending, and it was obvious that many were homeless. As they passed the offering plates around, I will never forget that the pastor instructed those in need to take whatever they needed from the offering plate when it came by. I watched as those who were undoubtedly in need passed it on without taking anything from it, and there were a few who put their "two mites" in.

We later talked to the pastor of the church and I remember him sharing with us that he was not a giving man, but he understood the principle of giving as laid out in Scriptures. He knew that God could never bless a

church unless the congregation was faithful to take care of those who were in need among them. The church is not just for reaching out to the lost, but to meet the needs of the sheep, spiritually and physically.

Second Corinthians 9 which is written to pastors tells us that all belongs to Lord and that He has dispersed abroad and given to the poor for His righteousness remains forever (*2 Corinthians 9:9*). Since the Lord laid out in the Old Testament how tithes were to be used, we need to seek His face as to where we must give our offerings to ensure it becomes a blessing to His kingdom. But, as for your situation, unless the Lord is laying it on your heart to give, don't let man force you to give under the false pretense that the more you give, the more God will bless you. God desires obedience from us more than sacrifice (*1 Samuel 1:22*). He doesn't always place His sheep in places to become a blessing to the church, but to be blessed by the church. When God places a person in the position of needing blessings, such a believer often becomes the test over which religious leaders trip (like the rich man who tripped over the poor sick beggar Lazarus in *Luke 16*, who was simply seeking crumbs) because they have lost sight of why the church really exists. †

THE HERESY OF SEED FAITH GIVING

By Mark H. Stevens, TH.D

The so-called principle of seed faith giving was first popularized by Oral Roberts almost 50 years ago. It proved to be so profitable to him that he essentially based his entire ministry on it. As with any other profitable venture others soon followed. Today it is used by virtually every "Faith" preacher, the majority of Christian television networks, and almost all TV preachers in general. It has even found its way into many mainstream and denominational churches.

A.W. TOZER QUOTES

"Only when we live in the name of Jesus can we truly pray in His name."

"What has the church gained if it is popular but there is no conviction, no repentance, no power?"