

outreach

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providing
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Matthew 28:19-20

representing



Was It the Devil?

It's often jokingly claimed when someone has transgressed that '*the Devil made me do it*'. Sin, of course, is no joke—but can we honestly pass the buck to the Devil?

Certainly, that first sin resulted from an encounter with this being. Mother Eve fell for his charms and everything changed for mankind—our relationship, above all, with the Creator, our relationship with the planet, our relationships with one another..

Strange Encounter

Let's examine more closely the events of that day. Our first parents were blissfully relaxing while walking through the woods. Eve wandered away a little and lingered by that one tree of which God had said '*... the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat of it: for in the day that you eat thereof you shall surely die*' (Genesis 2:16-17). But why *that* tree? Why not admire and enjoy the 'Tree of Life'?

Since their creation our first parents had a face-to-face relationship with the Creator. He had made them 'very good' (Genesis 1:31), physically perfect and without sin—but with freedom of choice. They had 'the Manual'—God's direct counsel on how to live and for some time enjoyed the blessings that resulted.

But, like King David, Eve had opened herself to temptation—which eventually came along in the form of one of God's creations, the 'serpent' (Heb *nachach*). And apparently unphased by hearing it talk she dallied with it, picking up on a previous conversation (*ch 3:1*)..

Deceived by the subtle claims of Satan (for that fallen spirit had taken over the creature) she had a picnic, and together with Adam she ate the fruit from this forbidden tree.

Having subdued mankind, Satan proceeded through our first parents to influence all mankind: '*...the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceives the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him*' (Revelation 12:9). The rest is history: '*...Through one man [Adam] sin entered into the world, and through sin death, and so death passed to all mankind in turn, in that all sinned*' (Romans 5:12).

But did Satan *cause* Adam or Eve to sin? The Devil certainly had power—power to destroy, to deceive, to tempt. Doubtless he had enormous influence in that first sin. But that doesn't mean Adam had to succumb. James the brother of Jesus writes: '*...resist the devil and he will flee from you*' (James 4:7). Likewise the apostle Peter: '*...Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walks about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist stedfast in the faith*' (I Peter 5:8-9).

The original humans were fresh from the creative hands of God and benefited from His direct instruction. They had the resources to resist, with free access to the *Tree of Life*. They didn't. So why didn't they?

In one respect they were no different from their offspring—us. Their nature, their power to choose, remains. James again: '*...every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust [desires], and enticed. Then when lust has conceived, it brings forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, brings forth death*' (*ch 1:14-15*). Just **cont'd p.4**

Prophetic Fascination

Many serious Bible believers have an almost obsessive fascination with the prophesied future. When will the ‘Great Tribulation’ strike? Who is ‘the Beast’, and, who are the ‘two witnesses’? When will the saints be resurrected—at the festival of Unleavened Bread or at Pentecost or at Trumpets? Where will they go? Will the ‘marriage supper’ be in heaven or in earth’s atmosphere? Indeed, what is it?

Just a skimming of future-related topics that have exercised the pens of lay and clergy alike down the centuries! No surprise that there’s confusion, given the complexity of the prophecies, the questions about the Calendar and the end date of the suggested 6000 years of human rule. And so on.

The ‘true’ scenario of end-time events is claimed by a variety of conflicting writers: ‘*My interpretation is absolutely right, yours is clearly gross error*’. Not much wiggle room, nor polite disagreement! And whole organizations are arrogantly erected around ‘my special understanding’. Yet there are more ideas as to end-time events than there are ‘heads’ of the Beast.

Given this confusion, who should you believe? Whose ‘work’ should you support? Or—do you really need to be concerned?

A Journey

If I take a train from, say, Lincoln to Edinburgh I’ve bought my ticket, boarded, stowed my luggage and now my focus is that I arrive in Edinburgh, preferably on time—though that is out of my hands. The passing scenery, the towns I pass through—Sheffield, Doncaster, York, Durham—may be interesting. *But they happen*, else no Edinburgh. The destination, the route, the arrival time are pre-set, and unless I disembark early (my choice) I’ll arrive in Edinburgh.

Isn’t it the same with prophesied events? All those occurrences en route to the establishment of God’s Kingdom on earth *will happen* and in God’s time—but I can influence them only marginally. I must, however, ‘stay on board’.

Wrong again

The predictions of great minds down the centuries have proved to be spectacularly wrong. ‘Certain’ dates for the return of Messiah have

passed without a ripple on our civilisation. The ‘False Prophet’ has been *misidentified* time and again. (The recent death of Cardinal Montini laid that claim to rest, as did the death of Alfredo Ottaviani in 1979.) The ‘Beast’ was once identified as the long-dead (*d.*1963) German Chancellor Franz Josef Strauss.

Caution!

Be Alert

However, I may be sitting on the train—but I also need to be attentive to announcements, perhaps of any need to change track. Although we may in general ignore the presently obscure predictions, yet we are warned by Jesus to be alert, in our own days, to the state of the world; else why would he detail end-time events.

Many Christians in first-century Judaea, for example, heeded Jesus warning to leave the area: ‘...*When you see Jerusalem surrounded by soldiers, you will know that it will soon be destroyed. If you are living in Judea at that time, run to the mountains. If you are in the city, leave it. And if you are out in the country, don’t go back into the city*’ (Luke 21: 20:21). On cue, they fled across the Jordan to Pella for safety (69-70AD).

Prophecy *is* intriguing and challenging. But in the words of the song: ‘*Whatever will be will be*’. In due time the Father will bring His will to pass. And now? ‘...*It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power*’ (Acts 1:7). Any believer without the necessary skills need not be concerned. Do listen to the ‘expert’ (though there are very few around!)—but stay anchored in the foundation principles of the faith. *And stay alert!*

Perhaps all we need to know is ‘...*the end is not yet*’ (Matthew 24:6). Read Revelation *chapter six to 19*—could anyone possibly miss those awesome events (*eg ch 8:7-12, 9:14-21*)? And Jesus will not yet have returned.

To Daniel, God’s messenger said: ‘...*Go your way, for the words are shut up and sealed till the time of the end*’ (*ch 12:9*). When prophetic words are unsealed there will, for those who have ‘ears to hear’, who remain faithfully becoming Christ-like—for them, all will become clear, Ω

Laxity—or growth?

It's not unknown for a believer to be labelled as 'Laodicean'. That is, they—as portrayed by the Christians in the town of Laodicea (Revelation 3)—are considered to have become slack in their submission to the truth of the Gospel.

Undoubtedly this is, not infrequently, the case. Indeed Jesus warned that in times of great pressure, '*...Many false prophets will rise up and lead multitudes astray; and because of the prevalent disregard of God's law the love of the great majority will grow cold*' (Matthew 24:11-12 Weymouth).

Can't we see the evidence all around us! The apostle John clearly defines for us what Jesus means by 'love'. '*...this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments*' (I John 5:3). Yet how many professing the name of Christ despise these same laws! No surprise, then, that they drift from the true faith. [But remember, Jesus still didn't abandon the Laodicean church (Revelation 3:19-21).]

Unchanging God

One fundamental characteristic of God is '*...I change not*' (Malachi 3:6). And it is said of Jesus '*... the same yesterday, and today, and for ever*' (Hebrews 13:8). We can depend on Him in every circumstance to remain faithful to His Word.

And, of course, there's much in the life of the believer that must not change. We are to remain faithful to God's calling until life's end. When we come to a right understanding in regard to a Bible teaching we hang on to it, we observe it.

But because a mature believer makes changes in his

Letter from England

Hello from Lincoln

It may seem odd to link Hallowe'en with the concept of jealousy—but God is 'jealous' (eg Exodus 20:4) and does make the link. And that's not at all surprising as He is the one and only true God. He alone among the so-called 'gods' is holy—perfect in His righteousness. He is jealous of that.

But Hallowe'en? Many of our readers are, likely, quite comfortable with this 'fun' celebration with its fancy dress, its partying—and its 'touch of the dark side'. Children love it. Other readers are horrified, noting its association with witches, the 'living dead', the dark arts. They are 'on the LORD's side!

We can base our lives on the shifting sands of tradition—indeed most Christians do—or we can build on the solid rock of God's revealed nature, His will, His unchanging laws.

Here's a sample of God's attitude: '*...There shall not be*

behaviour—is he or she thus Laodicean? Consider the counsel of the apostle Peter: '*...grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*' (II Peter 3:18). That implies *change*. At our baptism we receive God's Spirit—a real event—and we become in Christ 'a new creature'. From that moment our life begins a time of transformation, our goal to develop the character of Jesus: '*... be not conformed to this world: but be you transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God*' (Romans 12:2). No longer do we live by our own rules. *Change*.

As we thus 'grow in grace' we come to better understand, get better knowledge of, the nature of Jesus. We are not bound by '613 rules' but by the great moral law that undergirds our universe, '*...under the Law to Christ*', and living by '*...the perfect law of liberty*' (James 1:25). It is for each Christian to figure how, in the light of the Gospel, that personally applies. Paul, in Colossians 3, (and note v.10) describes that 'knowledge of Christ' to which we should aspire.

And take *doctrine*. Simply because a teaching is part of your church's 'catechism'—no matter how ingrained, how ancient—doesn't mean it truly reflects the Scriptures. Much of the true doctrine has been buried and superseded by humanly-devised concepts, no matter how sincere the teacher. It is *truth* that frees us.

It is vital, therefore that we each be alert to possible inaccuracies, and that we sift traditional teachings in the light of the Scriptures. We are encouraged to '*... grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord, Jesus Christ*'. Ω

found among you any one...that uses divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, Or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For all that do these things are an abomination unto the LORD' (Deuteronomy 18:10-12). It must become our attitude. Just because such verses are 'Old Testament stuff' doesn't mean God has changed.

Our children, of course, will not be doing these poisonous activities in reality. But in making them 'fun' these practices become more attractive, and—along with the other non-Biblical Christian traditions—drive a wedge between our children and the God whose name is 'Jealous'.

We ought to ask the question: Why did our God (and that was Jesus himself) command Israel to kill those who practised witches and their ilk? It was for these practices that the Canaanites were driven off the Land. Surely a warning for all Christians.

James

things which have once been in contact with each other continue to act on each other at a distance after the physical contact has been severed.

(Frazer)

‘...in my name’

Reflecting a trend from many pulpits in our own days, the prophet Jeremiah on several occasions decries those who speak ‘...in my name’: ‘... *They claim to speak for me [KJV ‘...in my name’], but they’re lying! I didn’t even speak to them, much less choose them to be my prophets. Their messages come from worthless dreams, useless fortune-telling, and their own imaginations*’ (ch 14:14). It’s an awesome thing, deliberately or deceived, to lie in God’s Name!

What does the phrase mean? Jesus expresses it on several occasions. For example: ‘...*whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receives me*’ (Matthew 18:5). And, ‘...*For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them*’ (Matthew 18:10). And, after Jeremiah: ‘...*For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many*’ (ch 24:5).

Ambassadors for Christ

To speak ‘in someone’s name’ implies that you have the full weight of their authority, their permission to be their spokesperson. That what you say perfectly reflects their views, their message. Step up to the Christian pulpit, then, and you are assumed to represent the Lord, to express the mind of Jesus the Messiah.

The term, ‘...in the name of the Lord’ is an Aramaic (the language of Jesus) expression that means ‘coming as his Ambassador’. That is, appointed by him to deliver his message to the people. Quite a responsibility. Should an Ambassador pervert the message he would be recalled. James, in a warning to aspiring preachers says, ‘...*we should not all try to become teachers. In fact, teachers will be judged more strictly than others*’ (James 3:1).

Jesus perfectly reflected the mind of the Father: He was ‘one’ with the Father (John 10:30): ‘... *I tell you for certain that the Son cannot do anything on his own. He can do only what he sees the Father doing, and he does exactly what he sees the Father do*’ (ch 5:19). And as emissaries of Jesus it is for every minister, every preacher, in matters of faith to—as did the apostles—teach what he taught, act as he acted, observe what he observed. As the apostle Paul observed: ‘... *whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus*’ (Colossians 3:17).

Lesson from History

After King Solomon died, Israel separated into two nations. For nearly three centuries the House of Judah stayed faithful, but the House of Israel (in the north) strayed and losing divine protection. they were deported and replaced by peoples from eastern heathen faiths. *They feared the LORD, and served their own*

The Devil... *cont’d from p. 1*

like Eve. In other words, we can’t pin our sin on Satan

But, with Paul, we should be aware of his ‘devices’, his cunning plans to deceive with ‘doctrines of demons’, with temptation, with affluence, with trials (II Corinthians 2:11). Satan is on the prowl: ‘...*Be on your guard and stay awake. Your enemy, the devil, is like a roaring lion, sneaking around to find someone to attack. But you must resist the devil and stay strong in your faith*’ (I Peter 5:8-9).

Sin is any behaviour—mental or physical—that runs contrary to ‘...*the glory of God*’ (Romans 3:23). None of us escapes sin! But the more we arm ourselves from God’s Word with His way and do our best with His help to apply it the more our desires will mirror His. Satan will not touch us. And, because of our filial relationship with the Father (His Spirit abides in us as Christians) when we sin we have direct access to reconciliation through the grace of our Saviour.

‘If we claim to be already free from sin, we lead ourselves astray and the truth has no place in our hearts. If we confess our sins, He is so faithful and just that He forgives us our sins and cleanses us from all unrighteousness’ (I John 1: 8-9). Ω

gods’ (II Kings 17:33).

Isn’t that pattern repeated in our day? Christian preachers ‘in God’s Name’ deliver a message that can’t be found in the Christian Bible. They, for example, wholeheartedly encourage their ‘flock’ to worship on days not sanctioned by God’s Word. They deceive by preaching the departed into heaven (never into ‘hell’!). And, to judge by their words, they are ignorant of what God says about the nature of ‘hell’. They teach, contrary to Scripture that mankind has an ‘immortal soul’. They leave the faithful in ignorance as to God’s purpose for mankind.

Teachers Beware

Like King Jeroboam they dishonour the true God by their traditions. The king ever after was branded as the one who ‘...*caused Israel to sin*’ (I Kings 14:16). As said James: ‘...*we should not all try to become teachers. In fact, teachers will be judged more strictly than others*’ (ch 3:1).

It is vital, then, that each of us ‘tunes in’ to what God says in His Word, that we compare—and challenge—what we read (including OUTREACH!) and hear from the pulpit. Is it, indeed, ‘...*in God’s Name*’? Ω