



UNMASKING SOPHISTRY

A Journal of Christian Evidences and Comparative Religions

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"See to it that there is no one who takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception in accordance with human tradition, in accordance with the elementary principles of the world, rather than in accordance with Christ."

(Colossians 2:8, NASB)

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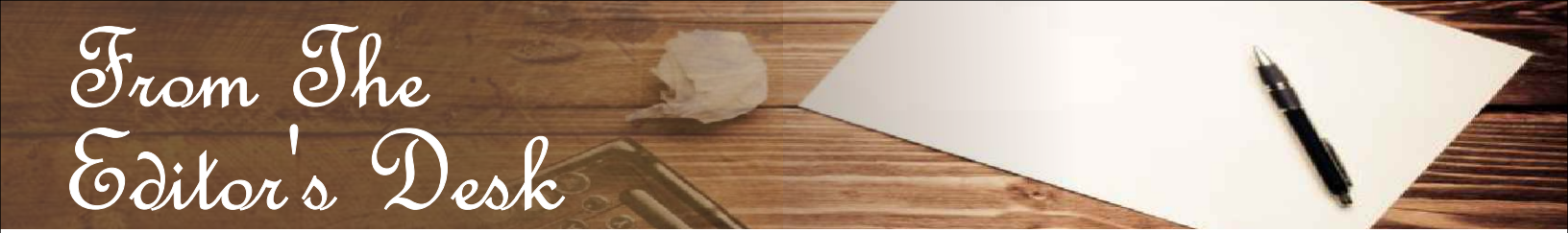
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From The Editor's Desk

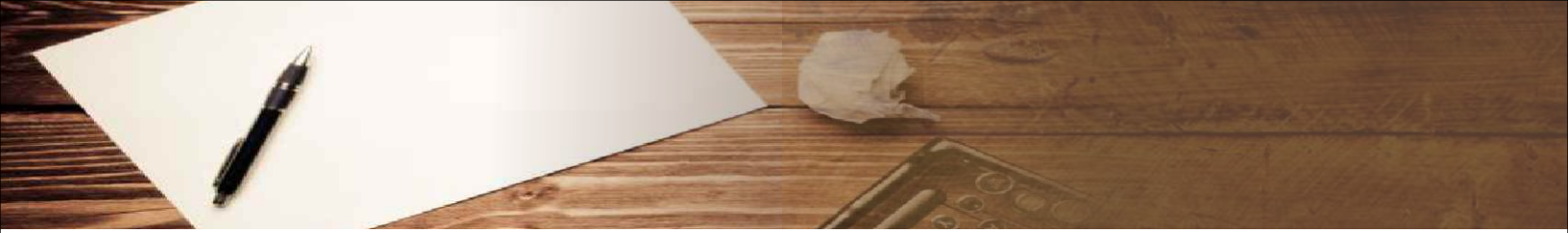
“The unexamined life is not worth living” says the Socratic Dictum. Similarly, the unexamined faith is not worth believing. It is with great joy and alacrity that we introduce you to the maiden edition of the quarterly journal, *“Unmasking Sophistry”*. That there are several theological concoctions flying about everywhere in the world today is a fact that is too plain to be denied. By “theological concoctions,” we mean the various religious beliefs, teachings, traditions and dogmas prepared by fallible men and which is being tenaciously upheld and propagated by their adherents.

Interestingly, almost everyone has a beautiful way of defending whatever it is they have believed. According to Ralph Williams, “Anyone who has been trained and skilled in the presentation of twisted rules of hermeneutics and the misrepresentation of the meaning of any context of scripture can easily manipulate the unsuspecting. Often such a distorted presentation may appear on the surface to be logical and scriptural. Only complete examination can reveal otherwise!”¹ Therefore, no matter how absurd a doctrine or faith may be, there is bound to be followers.

For some groups, each has its own peculiar object of worship and such usually influence their beliefs and practices. On the other hand, while majority claim belief in the one Almighty God, some do not believe in a god at all. Among those who believe in God (and who either belong to one religious denomination or the other), one singular problem is that each worships God in different ways contrary to the other and their attitudes towards the Bible differs. In fact, the religious world is so divided that some have concluded that religion is a major problem of the world. Most scholars estimate that there are about 4,300 active religions in the world.²

Meanwhile, the Holy Bible reveals that the whole duty of man is to “fear God and keep His commandments” (Ecclesiastes 12:13). This plain injunction raises several pertinent questions. For example, who is this God that the Bible speaks of that we must fear and keep His commandments? Is there a problem if we fail to keep His Commandment? How are we even sure that we can rely on these immutable words as contained in the Bible? Can we worship God in different ways and still be pleasing to Him? How do we identify the right religion that would lead us to God since we are to seek it first (Matthew 6:33)? These questions and more that bothers on religion and the evidences of Christianity are what this magazine aims to address.

Because of the diversity of views on these questions and the fact that the wisdom of men have conjured up several false defenses which sound appealing and most of which are intended to mislead people, this journal is designed to expose the various arguments that have been prepared in defense of false religion and arguments designed to oppose the Christian faith. According to the English dictionary, sophistry is the use of clever but false arguments, especially with the intention of deceiving. It is the deliberate use of a false argument with the intent to trick someone or a false or untrue argument. The Bible warns against sophistry in Colossians 2:8: “See to it that there is no one who takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception in accordance with human tradition, in accordance with the elementary principles of the world, rather than in accordance with Christ.” This begs the need for a journal of this nature.



Indeed, some are satisfied with the ecumenical spirit and sincerely thinks that we can be united in diversity; that is, it does not matter what religion you belong, but what matters is that God is worshiped. In other words, you could practice Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam or Judaism in this present dispensation and still be pleasing to the Almighty God. If this is true, then it makes God the author of confusion (cf. I Corinthians 14:33). How absurd would it be that the Almighty God will give conflicting commandments to different religious bodies and yet accepts all? Which of the commandments is man expected to keep since that is his whole duty?

Basically, this journal will teach and uphold the truth of God's Word and oppose things contrary to sound doctrine. For this magazine, there will be an open door policy. This means that both sides of a question or an issue will be published for the consideration of the readers. In other words, if someone disagrees with what was published herein, such could write an article in reply and we would be delighted to publish it in the same issue in which the article to which he is replying appeared. This is because this journal is not immutable and so there is room for reasoning together on any issues that pertains to life and godliness in the pages of the magazine.

In a consistent manner, there will be different sections in this magazine and topics relating to each section will be discussed under each of them. The sections include Christian evidences, world religions, discourse, church history, quibbles that backfired, institutionalism, ideal home, etc. This journal is a sine qua non and will be invaluable to everyone regardless of one's religious affiliation or beliefs. We wish you a happy reading and may you all be richly blessed.

Osamagbe Lesley Egharevba
Editor

¹ Ralph Williams (1985). Introduction. In: A Reply to a Jehovah's Witness by Guy Caskey. Mission Printing

² _Stephen Juan (2006) What Are The Most Widely Practiced Religions Of The World? Retrieved from https://www.theregister.com/2006/10/06/the_odd_body_religion/ on 12th February, 2021

CHRISTIAN EVIDENCES

Can We Rely On The Bible?

By Joseph Oyerinde

The Bible presents certain reasons for reliability and credibility of the Bible that command due trust of sincere and right thinking people everywhere and every time.

The Bible is a volume of writings from God written about 2000 years ago. Can we truly rely on it as the same words of God? The answer to this question is the thrust of this piece.

Alleged Adverse Criticism on the Bible Examined

One notable and widespread adverse criticism among the Bible critics to discredit the reliability of the Bible is corruption of the Bible. Patrick Cate, in his doctoral dissertation, expatiated on this allegation thus: “The corruption of the Bible takes two basic forms: corruption of the text and corruption of the interpretation of the Bible. The corruption of the text has three facets: (1) changing the text, (2) omission of part of the Bible, and (3) interpolating new material into the text” (as cited in McDowell et al., 1983, p. 36). These critics thus opine that the Bible has been changed many times over the years, altered, edited and corrected which resulted to various textual readings for different passages of the Bible.

It is important to note that the Bible scholars have critically observed that these variations are due to different English translations (not versions) of the Bible, and they in no significant way reflected on over 5,000 preserved original Greek texts from where English translations were made. Besides, throughout the translations, the variations did not alter any substantial substance or doctrine of the Bible. So, with time there will always be need for new translations of the Bible, as well as any other material in need years after, as the language advances and accommodates necessary contemporary changes. This will no doubt

always show insignificant variations in former and latter English translations of the Bible. Hence Thomas Nelson rightly prefaced that “readers may be assured that textual debate does not affect one in a thousand words of the Greek New Testament. Furthermore, no established doctrine is called in question by any doubts about the correct reading in this or that text. The Christian can approach his New Testament with confidence” (2008, p. vi). Nevertheless, Lightfoot accurately noted that “no translation is ever final. Because translators are human beings, there will always be room for improvements of translations. No translator can transcend his own time; he can only work in light of the knowledge of his day, with materials available to him, and put his translation in words spoken by his generation” (1963, p. 105)

Similarly, some critics also for years deny the credibility of the Bible in respect to the validity of Christianity. Knowing fully well that the primary purpose and essence of human existence and life is to worship the true God, one of the efforts that have been made to discredit the validity of Christianity and the Bible is on the doubt of some people that Jesus never gives the Christians any pattern of worship to serve God in the church.

Yusuf Adepoju (a Muslim and ardent propagandist of Islam in Nigeria) asked a question during his last debate with Olukele Adebayo (a gospel preacher in the church of Christ) that “Where in the Bible did Jesus guide the Christians how to worship God in the church?” Adepoju did not accept or concede any answer of Adebayo to the question from the book of



Acts to be correct because Adepoju only accepted that Jesus' words were only recorded in the first four books of the New Testament (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John). Adepoju's rejection of the answer is obvious because he was totally oblivious of the fact that the book of Acts written to Theophilus was a continuation (i.e. Volume 2) of the Gospel of Luke written to the same single recipient (Luke 1:1-4; cf. Acts 1:1-3). Luke affirmed to Theophilus that the book of Acts was the completion of his inspired historical records regarding the account of "all that Jesus began both to do and teach" in the Gospel of Luke (Luke 34:36-51; cf. Acts 1:1-9). In view of the foregoing, it is completely inconsistent, or perhaps a blatant ignorance, to accept the inspired record by Luke written in the Gospel of Luke, and yet in the same breathe reject the record of Acts – a continuation and the complete account of the inspired record by the same writer.

Meanwhile, contrary to the practice of Judaism, Jesus directly taught His early disciples of how to worship God in the church in the first four books of the New Testament. He taught them how to pray in Christianity with a pattern different and contrary to the pattern of prayer in Judaism (Matt. 6:9-13; Acts 4:23-30). He instituted the memorial meal to commemorate His death as an act of Christian worship in the church (Mark 14:22-25; Acts 20:7). He guided them on how to give to God liberally to receive divine blessing in contrast to payment of tithe (Luke 6:38; 1 Cor. 16:1-2). He instructed them to teach the new converts all other things He taught (Matt. 28:28). All these and other acts of Christian worship these writers and other inspired writers further expatiated in the remaining books of the New Testament. For instance, Luke, as well as other writers of the Bible, recorded the pattern the Holy Spirit sent

by Jesus, (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:12-15) gave to worship God and examples of how the primitive Christians (the church) followed the pattern of the worship (Acts 2:42; 20:7; cf. 1 Cor. 11:23-30; 16:1-2). Hence, it is completely fallacious for Yusuf Adepoju to thus posit in the edited video record of the debate (as published on YouTube by ACADIP Nigeria) that "no specified Christian mode of worship in the Bible," if he is aware and accepts that the Bible is a volume of 66 harmonious books written by inspired men (Eph. 3:3-5; 2 Pet. 1:20-21).



Evidences for Reliability of the Bible

The Bible presents certain reasons for reliability and credibility of the Bible that command due trust of sincere and right thinking people everywhere and every time. These reasons show that only insincere men can doubt the credibility of the Bible as the word of God today. We can rely on the Bible because:

1. The Bible is inspired of God (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:19-21). The Bible does not literally claim to be from God as some books falsely feign inspiration; there are couple of both external and internal evidences that support honest claim of the Bible. Two outstanding of those internal evidences are scientific proofs of the Bible and miraculous prophecies of the Bible. Among others, the Bible has declared hundreds of years ago the spherical shape of the earth and the paths of the seas before they were ever discovered by



the scientists centuries later (Isaiah 40:22; Psalms 8:8). These were not just coincidences because it was formerly for long widely believed among the scientists that the earth was flat; and no one among the living ever has any clue of paths of the seas for donkey of centuries. Similarly, by prophet Isaiah, the birth of Jesus through a virgin has been said more than 700 years ago before it was exactly fulfilled (Isaiah 7:14; Matt. 1:18-25). Pronouncement of a virgin to conceive and give birth to a baby (without the involvement of any masculine) in the next hundreds of years is beyond a mere prediction of men based on certain experience. Only a book with divine origin could manifest such evidence of miraculous prophesy.

2. The Bible is the complete and final will of God (2 Tim. 3:16; Rev. 22:18-19). The Bible did not claim to be inspired only; it claims to be the complete and final will of God for mankind. It needs no addition, subtraction or modification whatsoever. It has been once and for all time delivered to man (Jude 3). In fact, it is the standard of judgment on the last day (John 12:48; Rev. 20:12). Only a book with divine origin could manifest such characteristic.

3. There are reliable quantity and quality of ancient materials on the Bible text. History has recorded vast numbers of materials that show the authenticity of the Bible beyond reasonable doubt. Invention of Bible archaeology has tremendously supplied much credence to the validity of the Bible such as in discovery of older manuscripts with which to establish the text of both the Old and New Testaments. Sir Frederic Kenyon said, “The number of manuscripts of the New Testament, of early translations from it, and of quotations from it in the oldest writers of the Church, is so large that it is practically certain that the true reading of every doubtful passage is preserved in some one or other of

these ancient authorities. This can be said of no other ancient book in the world” (as cited in Lightfoot, 1963, p. 120).

Conclusion:

Jesus said, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away” (Mark 13:31). Trust in the Bible as the word of God is not a mental reservation out of unverified belief. It is a conviction out of undeniable pieces of evidence from inspiration of the Bible, complete and final nature of the Bible, and attestation of quantity and quality materials available on Bible text. So you can trust the Bible as guide for salvation of your souls. The Bible guides that you have to believe in Christ (Mark 16:16), repent of your sins (Acts 17:30), confess Jesus' Lordship (Rom. 10:9-10), and be immersed in water into the church of Christ (Acts 2:38, 41, 47) in order to be saved. “Now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized” today (Acts 22:16). Today is the day of your salvation (2 Cor. 6:2).

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CHRISTIAN EVIDENCES



Why Does The All Loving, All Powerful God Allow Suffering?

By Emmanuel Olu. Alonge

That many have abandoned their belief in God over the years because of the presence of pains and sufferings is a fact. Charles Darwin did so because of the death of his daughter, Annie. Thomas Huxley because of the death of his son, Noel, said farewell to belief in God.

On daily basis, we deal with physical and emotional pains and trauma. Our ordeal, distress and suffering affect us and our world view. The catastrophic picture of volcanic explosion, earthquake, flood, famine, accidents, drowning, epidemic, disease of various kinds that maim, inflict pains and anguish which ultimately lead to death, bring sorrows and severe pains. But why? Where is God? Why doesn't He do something? If God is all-good, all-loving, all-powerful and all-merciful, why would He permit evil and suffering? These are questions of every generation. "Surely... one of the most frequent causes of unbelief (in God) is the existence of evil, pain and suffering in the world." (Thompson, 2004:94 emp. EOA)

Steven Weinter in a chapter of his book that he titled "What About God?" compares the beauty of nature with the suffering of man. He penned,

"I have agreed that sometimes nature seems more beautiful than strictly necessary...But the God of birds and trees would have to be also the God of birth defect and cancer..." He said further, "Remembrance of the Holocaust leaves me unsympathetic attempts to justify the ways of God to man. If there is a God that has special plans for humans, then He has taken very great pains to hide His concerns for us" (1993pp.250-251).

The former well-known televangelist turned atheist, Charles B. Templeton in His book, Farewell to God explained why he quit. Among his challenges was "... if there is a loving God, why does He permit – much

less creates- earthquakes, droughts, floods, tornadoes, and other natural diseases which kill thousands of innocent men, women and children every year? How can a loving, omnipotent God permit – much less create – encephalitis, cerebral illnesses to afflict millions of men, women and children, most of whom are decent people?" (1996, pp 221;230)

That many have abandoned their belief in God over the years because of the presence of pains and sufferings is a fact. Charles Darwin did so because of the death of his daughter, Annie (See Desmond and Moore 1991 pp. 386-387); Thomas Huxley because of the death of his son, Noel, said farewell to belief in God.

But how shall we respond to the charges against God because of the presence of evil, pains and suffering? First, we must remember that when God created the heavens and the earth, the creation was good. Genesis record states, "Then God saw everything that He had made and indeed it was very good." (Genesis 1:31) Adam and Eve then lived in a serene and calm environment free of pains and suffering until they broke their covenant relationship with their creator in eating from the forbidden tree. (Genesis 3:1-6) "When our original parents revolted against their creator, evil entered the World" (Thompson, 2000 p.101). We agree with Porter's assessment that "... the cause of all that is wrong with the earth is not godliness but rather ungodliness" (1974:91). The matter of personal volition has much to do with the problem of human suffering.



God, who loves man (John 3:16) and who Himself is love (1John 4:8) grants mankind freedom of choice (Josh. 24:15; Isa. 7:15). This liberty enables man to make personal choices. Man was not made like robot to serve slavishly without any kind of freedom. This is why we are referred to as free moral agency. When mankind makes foolish choice, it can have devastating consequence which may include suffering. When he now reaps the effects of his wrong choice, should we blame God, indict God or conclude that God does not exist?

We must also understand that God created this world to be ruled by natural laws which naturally are established in the creation. If a man missed his steps on top of a twenty-five story building, the law of gravity will pull him down to the floor. If someone mistakenly runs into a moving car, it is a natural law that two objects cannot occupy the same space at the same time. The car will hit him and may kill him. This can happen to anyone irrespective of belief and stand. In Luke 13:1-5 Jesus mentioned the tower in Siloam that collapsed and killed eighteen people. Did they die because they were worst sinners? No, they died because natural law was in force. We cannot blame God either.

More than natural sources, human have unquestionably inflicted more suffering on one another, thus, making others miserable. Come to think of sexual humiliation, torture, piercing someone with hot iron, the human slaughters, causalities of wars, suicide and various forms of barbaric cruelty that men caused others and themselves. God doesn't cause it and He doesn't want it either.

Better still, the question as regard suffering should not be 'why did this or that happen? Rather, it should be how can one understand what has happened and how

does one need to react to it? God most time has greater purpose than we probably cannot see. For instance, Jesus had to suffer for man to be saved and be taken back home to God. **“For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh made alive by the Spirit”** (1Peter 3:18). In the same vein, much as unbelievers hate to admit it, there are times when suffering is actually of benefit to mankind. Consider the following:



Suffering is a reminder of our infirmities. We are not God. We are mere human and frail. Some are ambitious to be their own God. They want to be accountable to no one higher than themselves. They believe they are the captain of their ship and master of their faith. They submit to the self-imposed law of their arrogant minds. This can explain why they want to explain away the existence of the Almighty God. But one of the benefits of suffering is that it reminds us of the frailty and weakness of mankind and that the solution to human limitation is objective and not dependent on us (Job 6:13). The pride in man is humbled when he experienced suffering. This gives him reason to call on the Lord. Naturally, we turn to the higher source for help when we are hurt. The God of all comforts is willing and waiting to help. David in Psalm 18:6 said **“In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried out to my God; He heard my voice from His temple, and my cry came before**



Him even to His ears.”

The Bible does not hide it that the world is suffering from the consequences of heinous sin of man resulting from man's disobedience; God declared “in toil you shall eat ... all the days of your life... in sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground” (Genesis 3:17-19). “Therefore, just as through one man, sin entered the world and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned” (Roman 5:12). Suffering thus gives man insight to God's view and attitude to sin and disobedience.

In addition, when one approaches the threshold of death, this world makes more meaning. It clarifies what is truly valuable and helps to take mind away from frail, meaningless and feeble things that man wastes time to pursue. At such time, the singing of births, crow of cock, fresh spring of water, friends and family look more precious and valuable. Then we will put material things in proper perspective, place them where they belong and start to put values on those valuables God endows us with. Suffering prepares man to be compassionate to others. Wayne Jackson penned; “one cannot comfort effectively until he has lain in the bed of suffering”. Jesus, according to the Hebrew writer, succors and aids us as High Priest, “For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted” (Hebrew 2:18).

Suffering sharpens our awareness that this world is not our home. Peter reminded the early Christians of the fact that they were “sojourners and pilgrims” (1Peter 2:11). Hebrew writer talked of heroes of faith, the Patriarchs, who “quenched violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong became valiant in battle...were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they may obtain a better

resurrection. Still others had trials of mocking and scourging, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskin, being destitute, afflicted and tormented. Of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in desert and mountains, in dens and caves of earth” (Heb. 11:34-38). But they “confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth...declared plainly that they seek a homeland...they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country” (Heb. 11:13-16). Apostle Paul reminds Christians, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Roman 8:18). It is not God's will that man live in this evil-plagued planet forever. Children of God will not be at home here till we are with the Lord (2 Cor.5:8).

In conclusion, God is all-good, all-loving and all-powerful. He is sovereign. Trials, pains and sufferings should not be allowed to weaken our belief; rather it should strengthen our faith.

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WORLD RELIGIONS

The Myth of African Traditional Religion

By Kolawole Ajibola, Ph.D

African Traditional Religion has been described with some terminologies which some African scholars have disputed in their writings. Terminologies as animism, ancestral worship, fetishism, heathenism, idolatry, juju, paganism, primitive, savage, and others.

Introduction

Every nations of the world do have one peculiar religion or the other. In fact, men have worshipped just anything and all things have been worshipped as gods. The issue of religion in the world of today has gone to an unbelievable point that men have even killed (and still kill) themselves in the name of religion. Among this confusion is the different classification of religion on the ethnic, tribe, national, or religious lines. One of such classification is named "African Traditional Religion". In this piece, the thrust is on the myth of African Traditional Religion.

Definition of religion

Religion has been defined variedly and variously by scholars with no universally acceptable definition. For example, religion has been defined as the "feeling, act, and experiences of individual men and women in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine" (James, 1902) in Bonsu (2016). Religion is "an awareness and recognition of a dependent relationship on a transcendent Being, the Wholly Other, nameable or un-nameable, personalized or impersonalized expressible in human society through beliefs, worship and ethical or moral behaviour" (Ekwunife, 1990). According to another scholar, religion is an "interpersonal relationship between a person and a transcendent personal being believed to exist" (Omogbe, 1999).

In the Bible, the word 'religion' is from the Greek word 'θρησκεία', (*thriskeia*) which is used three times in the

the New Testament (Acts 26:5; James 1:26, 27) and other variants, not less than two times (Galatians 1:13, 14) indicates ceremonial observance, religious worship, (Strong, 1990; Vine, 1999).

Conclusively, one may confidently say that the main fact and focus or "core element" (Bonsu 2016) of religion is about "belief" in the divine or Supreme Being.

African Traditional Religion

The African Traditional Religion (ATR) is also known as African religion. It is also known as "indigenous religious beliefs and practices of the Africans" (Awolalu, 1976, p.1; Bonsu, 2016, p.109). Unlike Christianity and Islam, ATR has no published sacred book. The ATR as a religion, according to Awolalu (1976), continues "from the sustaining faith held by the forebears of the present Africans, and which is being practiced today in various forms and various shades and intensities by a very large number of Africans, including individuals who claim to be Muslims or Christians" (p.1). ATR has been described by "some racially motivated terminologies such as savagism, juju, fetishism, animism, magic, paganism, heathenism and ancestral worship" (Bonsu 2016, p.109). It is however evident that the Africans are very serious with their religious belief. Bonsu (2016) affirmed that "generally, African people are very religious and for that matter, religion permeates in all aspects of life, i.e. drumming, dancing, singing, ceremonies, festivals, marriages among others" (p. 109).



To Awolalu (1976), ATR is not a “fossil” religion, a thing of the past or a dead religion. It is a religion that is practiced by living men and women”.

Africa is a large continent with multitudes of nations who have complex cultures, innumerable languages and myriads of dialects. But in spite of all these differences, there are many basic similarities in the religious systems—everywhere there is the concept of God (called by different names); there is also the concept of divinities and/or spirits as well as beliefs in the ancestral cult. Every locality may and does have its own local deities, its own festivals, its own name or names for the Supreme Being, but in essence the pattern is the same. There is that noticeable “Africanness” in the whole pattern.

The Myth of the ATR

Due to the fact that there is no universally acclaimed sacred book of the ATR, it is rather difficult to declare some positions with all assertiveness about ATR. However, the following are suffice in the literature.

There are traces of animism in African Traditional Religion. For example, Oshun River in Osun State of Nigeria which is believed to be more than river but that it possesses spirits that resides in it. Another example is Iroko tree, which is believed by the adherents of ATR that it possesses spirit, hence, to them, it is not an ordinary tree. The list is unending, some believes in mountains, lightening and thunders are gods to some, in some countries, reptiles such as snakes are worshipped as god, cows are revered, and so many others.

African traditional religion also believe in ancestral worship. This arose from believe that ancestors enjoy a divine super human status with special religious powers that can be harmful or beneficial to the earthly relatives.

What does the Bible says about African Traditional Religion?

The African traditional religion is not addressed in the Bible in particular but most of its practices are utterly condemned. To the Israelites, God gave the commandment that they should eschew idols (Exodus 20:4; Leviticus 26:1; Deuteronomy 7:25).

God, who created human being knows what we are capable of doing, hence, He commanded that *“beware, lest your hearts be deceived and you turn away and serve other gods and worship them”* (Deuteronomy 11:25; cf. 16:22; Psalms 81:9).

God has vowed and said: *“I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, nor My praise to graven images”* (Isaiah 42:8).

In the New Testament, Christians are encouraged to guard against idols (I John 5:21).

The vanity of idol worship is explicitly explained in the pages of the sacred writings (Jeremiah 10:5, 15; 50:38; 51:14; Daniel 5:23; Habakkuk 2:18; Acts 17:29; I Corinthians 10:19). Some of the idols that people of the old worshipped are also identified such as Ashtaroth (Judges 2:13), Baal (Hosea 2:8), Baal-peor (Deuteronomy 4:3), Chemosh (Number 21:29), Dagon (1 Samuel 5:2), Artemis (Acts 19:24, 28, 35), Molech (2 Kings 23:10). There are some other objects that Bible identified as object of worship which God condemned. Some of them are: the golden calf (Exodus 32:4; Acts 7:41), the golden calves of Jeroboam (1 Kings 12:28; 2 Kings 10:29), heavenly bodies (Ezekiel 8:16; Deuteronomy 4:19), household gods (Genesis 31:19; Judges 17:5; Hosea 3:4), people deified (Acts 12:22), and demons (Leviticus 17:7; Deuteronomy 32:17; Psalm 106:37; I Corinthians 10:20; Revelations 13:4).

Beyond worshipping idols, graven images, stones,



trees, rivers, mountains, etc., another form of false religion which the Bible condemned is any religion without divine (scriptural) authority. In the book of Judges 17-19, we noted that a lack of respect for God's authority leads to false religious practices in a man named Micah. This has been a major trap to so many religions and religious practices.

Some people if not most who are in ATR or such similar to it have good intentions, however, whatever God has condemned stand condemned irrespective our good intentions. In Judges 17:1-5, it was recorded that the intention of Micah's mother was to honor God. She says as much in verse 3. The silver was dedicated to Yahweh. However, she used it for a forbidden practice. In Isaiah 42:8, God says, "I am the LORD: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images." The intention was good, but the practice was wrong. Good intentions are not sufficient when religion has no authority. Note that God has made Himself clear from the beginning about graven image (Exodus 20:4, 5).

Today, when people forsake God's law, they will behave according to their own opinions. The result is always catastrophic! God has given us His word so that we can know how God expects us to act (Psalm 119:105 "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path."). Therefore, God is Who He is, His word is the standard for right and wrong. His word is law. We simply cannot afford to live outside of God's rule or standard of behavior. We must be a people governed by God's word and not by our own opinions.

Conclusion

It has been proven that all religions and religious activities not authorized by God cannot be acceptable to Him. Anyone in such needs to hear the gospel of

Christ, believe the gospel of Christ, repent of his/her sins, confess his/her faith in Christ, and be baptized in water for forgiveness of his/her past sins and live faithfully till death.

I plead with you to first render obedience to the gospel of Christ as proclaimed by Peter and all the apostles (Acts 2:36-38). If you obey, God's Word says that you will then be added by the Lord Himself to His church (Acts 2:47). Thereafter, you have the responsibility to learn and follow the apostles' doctrine as you serve the Lord Jesus in your life.

Would you act like those that heard Peter on the day of Pentecost? Those who "gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them" (Acts 2:41). Be like them today, renounce all the other religions and embrace Christianity, the only true religion!

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WORLD RELIGIONS



Is Christianity a Religion or a Way of Life?

By Osamagbe Lesley Egharevba

Many scoff at the idea that Christianity is a religion. It is very common to hear and read people speak about Christianity as not a religion but only a way of life. This sentiment is being paraded almost everywhere. In fact, one of those who hold this position, penned down the following in one of the blogs;

“...if Christianity is a religion, then we could conclude that whatever God the Father, Jesus the Son and God the Holy Spirit planned for mankind is a mere religion. If Christianity is a religion, then God didn't have to send Jesus, His own Son to establish it. The objective of the plan of salvation that began after man sinned and was cast out of Eden was not to establish a religion. **No, Christianity is not a religion. Christianity is a way of life.**”

In the first place, the plan of salvation did not begin AFTER man sinned and was cast out of Eden. Rather, the plan of salvation began BEFORE the foundation of the world and there are abundant passages of the Holy Scriptures which affirms this eternal truth (I Peter 1:20; Ephesians 1:4; Titus 1:2). To insist that the plan of salvation began after the fall of man is to insinuate that God was oblivious of the fact that man would fall and that His plan was an afterthought. This indeed is an attempt to jettison the omniscient nature of God (cf. I John 3:20; Isaiah 40:28; 46:10; Psalm 139:4; Romans 1:20).

Secondly, what exactly does this writer mean by religion that he contends Christianity is not? While he never gave an exact definition of religion in his writing, it seems that his idea of religion is captured in one of the paragraphs when he said:

“If Christianity is a religion, then it might be no different from the many religions in our present day

world where the major aim isn't making positive difference in the present, but following a set of rules to pass an examination for eternity.”

According to this writer's concept of religion, “following a set of rules to pass an examination for eternity” is a major characteristic of world religions and which to him, is incongruous and not an element of Christianity. To him, Christianity is all about imitating Christ, leading good lives, doing good, loving and helping one another, etc. but has nothing to do with devotion to a set of rules as prerequisite to reach eternal life. While it is admitted without an iota of doubt that Christianity requires leading godly lives, imitating Christ and keeping oneself unspotted from the world; and thus – a way of life (Titus 2:11-12; Hebrews 12:14; James 1:27), to deny that Christianity is a religion on the basis of it not having a “set of rules” to be obeyed towards eternal goal is untrue and an unfounded claim.

One question that comes to mind is this: has Christ not given “a set of rules”? Indeed, the Bible makes a distinction between the commandments of men (Matthew 15:8-9) and the commandments of God (I John 5:3). This same text and others point to the fact that we have no love for God if we fail to keep His commandments (John 14:15; 15:14). In the book of Genesis, when God made man and placed him in the Garden of Eden, God gave him certain commandments that He must keep if man must remain in the garden. One of those is that he must not eat “of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil...for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” (Genesis 2:17). The serpent came with his own commandment and circumvented God's command (Genesis 3:1-5). Man had a choice to either follow God's commandment or the Devil's. Similarly, the



children of Israel were given commandments to be followed in order to be pleasing to God. He said "...if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine." (Exodus 19:5). The Israelite had a choice to obey God or follow other gods. Even before the Law was given at Sinai, the Bible records that Abraham "kept the commandments of the Lord" (Genesis 26:5). But what about the Christians today? Do they have a set of rules from Christ? Surely, for Christ spoke of obedience to His Father's will as a condition to enter into the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 7:21, 24-27). The point is: God has been dealing with man right from time immemorial, in every dispensation by giving man rules to obey. And in every dispensation, there are always counter rules made by men to draw God's children away from Him.

If by "set of rules," the writer meant the commandments of men, then I insist that is not what we must follow to go to heaven. However, the Bible thus teaches that we must follow the commandments of Christ to make heaven (Acts 2:42; II John 9). James calls it "the perfect law of liberty" (James 1:25). Another obvious fact is that all of these things that are referred to as "the way of life" (such as helping the sick) constitutes a set of rules that must be done without which no one can see the Lord (Hebrew 12:14). In other words, one cannot separate "the way of life" from "a set of rules." If you are living the way of life Christ wants you to live, you are following "the set of rules" that Christ has commanded you (I Corinthians 11:1).

But come to think of it, if Christianity is merely a way of life like this author contends, what this simply means in essence is that a Muslim can be a Christian because he loves, does good, humbles, visits the sick,

etc. Likewise, we can absolutely get as much as many people who are Christians from other religions of the world. But no! All people who are living a good life are not saved because of their morality. If it were so, Cornelius would have been saved and not be required to do anything else (Acts 10:1-3). But he had to be obedient to some other requirements despite the fact that he was even a lover and fearer of God (Acts 10:1-2, 22).

What about James 1:26-27? This passage is a killing blow to those who teach that Christianity is not a religion; and it is not surprising to see that the writer of this article never referred to it in his writing. James says;

"If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, that one's religion is useless. Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world"

James speaks of a religion and shows how such could be useless and how it could be pure and undefiled. One could make his religion useless by practicing what is not acceptable to Christ and one could practice pure religion by visiting those in affliction and then keeping oneself unspotted from the world – thus imitating Christ (I Peter 2:21-23). What religion was James talking about? It is the Christian religion! And so, Christianity is both a religion and a way of life. In the next edition, we shall give attention to other matters relating to why Christianity is a religion.

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DISCOURSE

The Scriptures Teach That A Sinner Is Saved By Grace Through Faith Before And Without Baptism

Affirmative: Victor Ayeni (Christ Life Church)

Denial: Osamagbe Lesley Egharevba (Church of Christ)

The above proposition is affirmed by Mr. Victor Ayeni (Christ Life Church) stating that baptism is not necessary in order to be saved. O. Lesley Egharevba (Church of Christ) denies the proposition and insisted that a man cannot get salvation without baptism in water for the forgiveness of sins.

Affirmative by Victor Ayeni

The proposition that I seek to defend is this: the Scriptures teach that a sinner is saved by grace through faith, before and without baptism.

I will lay out my supporting arguments by succinctly explaining how the Bible defines salvation by grace through faith and examining the Bible texts that are often used to add baptism as an extra condition of salvation.

Once the consistent teaching of Scripture is presented on this proposition, one can have the complete picture about the terms employed by the Bible. (Note: Unless otherwise indicated, all quotes are from the NKJV).

In Romans 3-5, Paul convincingly established the truth that salvation is obtained by grace through faith. After indicating the depth of human sinfulness and emphasizing the failure of the law to bring salvation, he made it clear that the only way a holy God declares sinners righteous is through their faith in Christ, the perfect sacrifice for sin.

To demonstrate that human works have nothing to do with salvation, Paul pointed out that Abraham was justified before he was circumcised (Rom. 4:1-12). Circumcision was a symbolic observance for Old Testament saints as baptism is for New Testament believers.

Paul said again in Romans 5:1 “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

He then drew an analogy between the first Adam, who brought condemnation and death by his one act of disobedience, and Jesus Christ, the last Adam, who provided justification and life for all through His one act of obedience.

Romans 6:2b “How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?” When a person receives the Lord Jesus as his Saviour, he dies to the domination of sin. In Christ believers have died to sin, and this is the truth signified by baptism.

By going down into the waters of baptism, we who have placed our trust in Christ, testify that through our union with Him we have been buried with Him in His death.

Having died to sin, we are no longer under its condemnation or bondage. Then, our emergence from the waters of baptism signifies that through our union with the living Lord we have been raised from death with Him.

“Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4).



Water baptism therefore, symbolically speaks of our identification with Christ. It's the new believer's first step of obedience and public testimony of a new life of peace with God. In Romans 6:3 we read: "Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?"

When Paul made reference to believers being "baptized into Christ Jesus," he used an expression that is identical in construction to a statement in 1 Corinthians 10:2, where he said that the Israelites were "baptized into Moses."

The Israelites, having already chosen to follow Moses out of Egypt, were openly identified with him when they passed through the Red Sea. In like manner, we become followers of the Lord Jesus the moment we place our faith in Him as Lord.

And in our baptism "into Christ Jesus," we openly identify with Him as our leader and guide. More on this below as we examine the Bible texts often used to teach that there's no salvation without water baptism.

a) Mark 16:16 "Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned"

This verse does not say that baptism saves or is essential to salvation. It's those that don't believe that will be condemned, not those who aren't baptized. Jesus never baptized anyone. If baptism contributes to salvation, then Jesus is not a Saviour, much less of the world.

The Bible is clear that salvation comes by believing the Gospel. "God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe" (1 Cor. 1:21; see also, Jn. 3:16, 18, 36, Rom 1:16, 4:24).

Paul in fact, distinguished between baptism and the gospel: "For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the

cross of Christ should be made of no effect." (1 Cor. 1:17). He then admits that he baptized only very few Corinthians, yet he said "for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel" (1 Cor. 4:15 KJV).

b) John 3:3, 5 Jesus replied, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God ... Jesus answered, Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."

If this text alone implied that water baptism was a key prerequisite to entering the Kingdom of God, then Jesus would have made it a requirement of salvation, but this is not so.

First of all, what does the word "born of water" in John 3:5 really refer to? To answer this, we have to look at other scriptures to see what are the agents and instruments by which the work of regeneration is wrought:

1 Peter 1:23 "Having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the WORD OF GOD which lives and abides forever"

James 1:18 "He chose to give us birth THROUGH THE WORD OF TRUTH, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created." (KJV)

1 Corinthians 4:15 "For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you THROUGH THE GOSPEL."

Titus 3:5 "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. "

In these passages we see that regeneration or rebirth is wrought by the word of God and Spirit of God. We are born again by the Word of God and the Spirit of God.



Now in John 3:5, we have the Spirit directly mentioned but can the "water" be taken to mean "the word" without forcing the language? First, let's compare it to Ephesians 5:25,26:

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water THROUGH THE WORD."

In John 15:3, Jesus said: "Now ye are CLEAN THROUGH THE WORD which I have spoken unto YOU." Therefore, a man is born again by the word of God and the Spirit of God.

c) Acts 2:38 "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Here I want to explain the biblical term "baptized into." It's used in four different contexts:

Baptism into repentance

"I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance..." (Matthew 3:11)

The Greek preposition rendered "unto" (or "for" in other bible versions) is *eis* which means "into." So literally, it reads as: "I indeed baptize you with water into repentance."

The people whom John baptized had already repented before they were baptized into repentance.

That baptism was only an outward acknowledgement of the repentance that had occurred inwardly. In fact, John the Baptist abruptly refused to baptize those who didn't show any proof of inner repentance:

"But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of

repentance." (Matt. 3:7-8)

Baptism into the forgiveness of sins

"When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:37-38 NIV)

"Be baptized...for the forgiveness of sins" in the Greek is literally "be baptized...into the forgiveness of sins."

As explained earlier, their sins were already forgiven by their repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. It wasn't the baptism at Pentecost that washed away their sins, it was only an outward testimony of the forgiveness of sins they had received.

Baptism into Christ

"Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." (Galatians 3:24-27)

Again, we see that they were already children of God through their faith in Jesus. They were already in Christ before they were baptized into Christ. Their baptism was simply a public acknowledgement of the spiritual adoption they had received.

Baptism into death

"How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:2-4)



Here, we see that being “baptized into” is used in connection with being baptized into the death of Jesus Christ. Baptism is then spoken of as a burial which indicates that the person first dies to sin through faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ before baptism (“the burial”) which publicly acknowledges that spiritual state.

Now, in the light of this understanding, let's look at 1 Cor. 12:13

“For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.” It means we were already in the body of Christ, regardless of our race or class, just as the people whom John baptized were already in repentance, just as the people baptized on the day of Pentecost were already forgiven of their sins, just as the people referred to in Galatians were already in Christ, and just as the people referred to in Romans were already dead to sin before they were buried in baptism into Christ death.

Therefore, in Acts 2:38, Peter wasn't suggesting that baptism is necessary for the forgiveness of sins, rather, he was calling for members of that generation which was guilty of having crucified Christ to separate themselves from a generation under the wrath of God. That separation was to be publicly signified through baptism – a figure of Old Testament ceremonial washing. It signified that the people had received forgiveness of sin.

It must also be pointed out that Cornelius and his household became saved and were filled with the Holy Spirit before they were baptized in water (Acts 10:44-48).

d) Acts 22:16 “Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling upon the name of the Lord”

The earlier explanation applies here. Ananias was

speaking to the recently converted Saul of Tarsus. In trying to understand the meaning of what he said, we must follow this basic rule of Bible study: Interpret every verse in the light of the clear teaching set forth in Scripture.

Since the truth of justification by faith is declared plainly in the Bible, we know that Saul was forgiven and saved the very moment he met Christ on the Damascus road and believed on Him. The baptism couldn't be to remit his sins any more than in the case of Christ (Mt. 3:16), the eunuch (Acts 8:37) or anyone else (1 Cor. 1:13-24).

e) 1 Peter 3:20-21 “Who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved by water. There is also an antitype which now saves us – baptism (not the removal of filth of the flesh but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ”

Peter wasn't saying baptism has any saving power. The waters of the flood point to judgement (in that they resulted from the sins of the world) and salvation (in that they offered a means of deliverance through the ark).

In much the same way, the water of baptism symbolises both the judgement resulting from sin, and the cleansing and forgiveness which result only from the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In other words, as Noah and his family in the ark were “saved” by the very same waters that judged the rest of the world, so also the waters of God's judgement poured out on Christ at Calvary for the sins of the world became the means whereby all who are in the ark of safety, the Lord Jesus Christ, are saved.



Notice again that Peter specifically says baptism doesn't remove the filth of the flesh but is the answer of a good conscience toward God.

There is an inward spiritual cleansing that is experienced by only those who have received Christ's forgiveness. Baptism itself doesn't remove sin; it's simply a symbolic testimony of an inner cleansing that has already occurred. Therefore, I uphold the proposition that a man is saved before and without water baptism.

Victor Ayeni is a journalist and blogger on The Kindled Flame Blog. His research interests revolve around theology, apologetics, church history, critical spirituality and cult/occult critiques. He is a member of Christ Life Church.

QUIZZES

Questions On Faith:


1. What church had their faith spoken of throughout the world in the New Testament?
2. What church had their faith spread abroad in the New Testament?
3. Can we please God without faith?
4. Will faith without works save?
5. How does faith come?

Correct answers will be published in the next edition. Kindly provide answers to the questions with relevant Bible passages. Include your name, congregation and location when sending and all answers should be sent to unmaskingsophistry@gmail.com

INTERESTING FACTS

Did you know that:

1. Sarah died when she was 127 years old, 37 years after she had given birth to Isaac (Genesis 23:1)
2. These words occur only once in the Bible:
 - a. Reverend (Psalm 111:9)
 - b. Eternity (Isaiah 57:15)
 - c. Grandmother (II Timothy 1:5)
3. Job's first daughter's name is Jemima (Job 42:14).
4. The phrase "under the sun" is used 29 times in Ecclesiastes and nowhere else in Scripture.
5. Rehoboam had 88 children (II Chronicles 11:21)
6. There is a verse in the Bible that contains more words than two different chapters in the Bible (Esther 8:9; Psalm 117; 150).
7. Luke is the largest book in the New Testament and if you also include Acts, he wrote about 28% of the New Testament.
8. The Bible was written in three languages: Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek.
9. The Bible was written by people from diverse occupational background.
10. The word "Rapture" is never mentioned in the Bible.
11. Ehud was the first left handed man in the Bible (Judges 3:15).
12. There was a lady named Noah (Joshua 17:3; Numbers 26:33).
13. There was a city called Adam (Joshua 3:16).
14. David had a son named Daniel (I Chron. 3:1).
15. A man named Judas lived on "Straight Street" (Acts 9:11).



The Scriptures Teach That A Sinner Is Saved By Grace Through Faith Before And Without Baptism

Denial by O. Lesley Egharevba

The above proposition is a mixture of both truth and error and I shall endeavour to show its falsity. I shall carefully pay attention and respond to the arguments made by Mr. Victor Ayeni in the affirmative article above. While I strongly believe that a man is saved by grace through faith, I do not believe that a man is saved by grace through faith BEFORE and WITHOUT baptism. Let me begin by putting things into perspective.

Setting the Facts Straight

First of all, I wish to state from the outset that in denying the above proposition, I am not affirming or maintaining baptismal regeneration; the doctrine that implies that there is power in water and thus, places emphasis on the water of baptism to save. I believe that the power to save is in the Lord Jesus and one is saved or gets forgiveness of sin by His blood (Ephesians 1:7; Matthew 26:28) when he obeys the command to repent and be baptized. In other words, Christ's blood is spiritually accessed when a penitent believer obeys God's command to be immersed in water, in the likeness of Christ's burial and resurrection unto newness of life (Romans 6:3-4; Colossians 2:12).

Secondly, in denying the above proposition, I am not affirming that men are saved by the works of the Law of Moses or by obedience to the law. I also do not believe that man is saved by his own righteousness, which is described by Isaiah as "filthy rags;" (Isa. 64:6) nor do I believe that salvation can be merited, earned or deserved by a meritorious work done by any man.

Two Kinds of Works

I honestly think that the major cause of confusion and disagreement on this issue of salvation by grace

through faith is over the meaning of the word "works." When we fail to make a clear distinction between meritorious works (which nullify grace) and the works of God (obedience which make faith perfect), confusion and misunderstanding is the result. These are the two kinds of works mentioned in the New Testament and while the former is excluded and irrelevant to our salvation, the latter is not. To show this distinction, I wish that we turn to the Scriptures.

The first class of works which is irrelevant to our salvation is found in Ephesians 2:8-9: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, **and that not of yourselves;** it is the gift of God, **not of works, lest any man should boast.**" Of what kind of works is our salvation not based on? It is not of boastful works and it is not of man's device. If I am able to take myself to heaven without the help of God, then I could boast of doing such by my own works or efforts. But our salvation is not so for we fully depend on God to enter heaven. This is not the kind of works that saves a man.

The second class of works is found in Acts 10:34-35, while Peter was speaking at the house of Cornelius, he said: "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation **whoever fears Him, and works righteousness,** is acceptable by Him." Here we have a class of works that is acceptable and necessary for one to be accepted by God or to be saved. Peter says a man must **work righteousness** before he is accepted by God! In fact, the Bible repeatedly affirms that "faith without works is dead" (James 2:14,17,20,24,26). Abraham was justified because he **ACTED** on his belief; he set out from his kindred in obedience to God's call NOT that he believed in his heart and argued that leaving Haran was not important as Mr. Victor posits on "faith and baptism."



The point is this: Our salvation is not of the first class of works (boastful works, works done by man, originated by man, and of which he is the inventor). It is not of this type lest a man should boast. On the other hand, it is of a class of works described by Peter as “works of righteousness.” Whatever comes under the head of righteousness is included in the gospel plan of salvation. And what is righteousness? David tells us what righteousness is in Psalm 119:172 when he said; “*For all Your commandments are righteousness.*” And so, a man works righteousness by being obedient to all the commandments of God. In fact, Jesus was baptized to fulfill all righteousness (Matthew 3:15) even when He had no sin (I Peter 2:21-22).

Hence, the works that are obligatory upon mankind are works of God, to which man submits. Therefore, baptism is not a work of the law and neither is it a work of man's righteousness but it is a part of man's faith response to the amazing grace of God which has appeared to all men (Titus 2:11).

Are We Still Saved By Grace When We Have To Do Something?

Mr. Victor thinks that if we do anything in order to get salvation, it becomes of works (of man's righteousness) and not of grace. Well, in Luke 17:10, Christ says, “*When you have done all things which are commanded you then ye shall say, We are unprofitable servants; we have only done that which was our duty.*”

We have not earned salvation; we have only done our duty, and we will be saved by grace through faith when we have done all things that he commanded.

Paul says in I Corinthians 1:30-31: “*But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God – and righteousness and sanctification and redemption – that, as it is written, he who glories, let him glory in the*

LORD.” And in Galatians 6:14 he says “*But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ...*” A demonstration of that fact is brought up in the falling of the walls of Jericho. The Israelites had to go around the walls for 6 days, and on the 7th day they had to go around seven times, and then blow the trumpets and shout before the walls fell. Is there any man who would think that there was any virtue in their work, except as obedience to God? They did not get the land by their own efforts but they had to do something (obey God's commandment) to get it. God had given the city to them (Joshua 6:2), but they had done what He commanded them to do (Joshua 6:3-27). In Hebrews 11:30, it says “*by faith the walls of Jericho fell down, when they had been compassed about for seven days.*”

Naaman was cleansed of his leprosy when he dipped the seventh time (II Kings 5:14). He was not cleansed at the point he decided in his heart to do it. He had to do what the Lord commanded, not part of it, but all of it. He went to the river, he dipped once, he dipped twice, he dipped the third time, the fourth, the fifth, the sixth, and still he was not cleansed but when he dipped the seventh time, he came clean. When he had done all that the Lord commanded him, he received the blessing of the Lord. Was it the water that cleansed him or was it his effort? No! The Lord saved him but AFTER he obeyed and did what he was asked to do.

The blind man was told to go wash in the Pool of Siloam. He went and washed and came seeing (John 9:7). Any man could look at the washing and see that the waters of Siloam did not bring back his eyesight to him. No man of intelligence would say a thing like that. Rather, it was his obedience – he did what he was asked to do! And so at this time when Jesus has said, “*he that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved...*” the believer, turning from the world to do the will of God,



in penitence going his way, is baptized into Christ—is buried with his Lord by baptism into death—and he is also raised with Him, through faith in the operation of God and thus, coming into Christ, his faith is made perfect and avails him and he is by his obedience, purified in soul, for Peter said in 1 Peter 1:22, “*Seeing ye have purified your souls in your obedience to the truth.*” That, indeed, is the way of salvation. Therefore, the fact that a man does a work in obedience to God’s command as a condition to be saved, does not mean he is saved by his own works or efforts.

What Kind of Faith Saves a Man?

Paul said in Galatians 5:6; “*For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.*” The faith that avails is the one that brings the blessings of God, and notice how that is done. In I John 5:3, John tells us just how that is, for he said, “This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments” That is the love of God, and faith working through love avails; faith working through love saves; faith keeping the commandments of God is the salvation that has been promised. Is baptism a command of God? If it be a commandment of God, then faith working through love, faith working through keeping the commandments of God, which is the love of God, avails and thus faith, leading the individual down in the water, to be buried there with his Lord in obedience to His commandment, is faith working and faith being perfected and that kind of faith saves when it is thus perfected.

Galatians 3:26-27 teaches that the kind of faith that saves a man is the kind of faith that includes baptism. “*We are all children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.*” The word “for” in verse 27 is from the Greek word “gar” and it means to “introduce the

reason” (of something previously mentioned) (See Thayer Greek Lexicon). This word “gar” connects with what preceded and shows how they got into Christ by faith. How? By being baptized into Christ they put on Christ and were saved. Thus, it means that they were children of God by faith inasmuch as they have been baptized. Victor was incorrect to conclude on this verse by saying that “*they were already in Christ before they were baptized into Christ*” and that “*their baptism was simply a public acknowledgement of the spiritual adoption they had received.*” That is not true and is not consistent with the context and meaning of the word used.

But were not the people baptized *into* Moses (1 Cor. 10:2)? Yes, they were baptized into that covenant of which Moses was the mediator, exactly as they are baptized *into* Jesus Christ. That is the transition. The word *into*, the primary meaning of the Greek word “eis” is transition, *into*, in the direction of. The same Greek word is used in Acts 11:18 when it is said that God granted to the Gentiles “repentance unto life.” If “baptized *into* Moses” means they were saved or chosen before their baptism, then “repentance *unto* life” **would mean that they got life or salvation before they ever repented.** Would Mr. Victor accept this? The point is: you are baptized into Jesus Christ. You are baptized into the body of Christ; you are baptized into the death of Christ; and there is the transition from the outside to the inside, as the word clearly suggests.

Addressing the Bible Passages on Baptism

Finally, I wish to take up the Bible passages presented in Victor’s article which teaches the necessity of baptism but which he denies.

On Romans 6, this passage clearly states that we walk in newness of life AFTER we have been buried with



Christ in baptism and then raised up with Him (vs.4). *“Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”* We do not walk in newness of life until after we have been buried and raised with Christ. In fact, verse 6 states clearly that our old man is crucified with Him and the body of sin is destroyed: *“Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.”* A man cannot have his old man crucified with Christ when He has not done that which is in the likeness of His death – baptism! Romans 6 teaches that it is at the point of baptism that a sinner DIES with Christ or partake of His death, is BURIED with Him and gets INTO Christ to be RAISED with Him. Verse 17 indicates such occur when you *“have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.”*

In Mark 16:16, we read the clear words of Jesus when He said; *“He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned”* On this statement, Victor affirms; *“This verse does not say that baptism saves or is essential to salvation. It’s those that don’t believe that will be condemned, not those who aren’t baptized.”* There is simply no way to get the salvation of Mark 16:16 in between belief and baptism. Belief AND Baptism are the two things one must do to get salvation as seen in that text. Now, let us give special attention to this parallel statement. Suppose a doctor says; *“He who eats his food and digests it will live. But he who does not eat his food will die.”* Will Mr. Victor argue from that statement that it is not important to have one’s food digested? Will he contend that digestion is irrelevant for a person to live since it is not repeated in the statement that *“He who*

does not eat his food and does not digests it will die?” I doubt if he or anyone will make such contention. Just as someone who does not eat does not digest so also those who do not believe do not subject themselves to baptism.

The truth is: it takes two things to be saved and it takes just one thing to be condemned. Baptism has no meaning without belief (Acts 8:36-39) just like digestion has no meaning without eating food. Hence, it was not necessary for Jesus to have repeated the words to read *“...he who is not baptized will be condemned.”*

And what about I Corinthians 1:17: *“For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect.”* Oh Paul! But why baptize Crispus and Gaius (vs.14)? Since you were not sent to baptize, why did you even baptized the household of Stephanas (vs.16)? Are you not doing what God has not sent you to do? Mr. Victor will make Paul contradict himself. But no! Paul responds; Christ did not send me to baptize in my own name (vs. 13, 15) and He did not send me to preach the gospel with wisdom of words (vs.17). That is simply what that text teaches!

In John 3:5& 5, Jesus said; *“...unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God...unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.”* This text has given a lot of problems to those who reject baptism as a condition of salvation. And in order to disproof this text, Victor cites passages that says we are saved or regenerated by the word of God or the gospel and then ignores other elements mentioned along that line. One of the passages he cites (Titus 3:5) mentions that God saved us, *“through the washing of regeneration AND renewing of the Holy Spirit.”* And he says nothing about the



“washing” except that it must mean the word of God. Well, Jesus says the Spirit is the Word (John 6:63) and born of water and Spirit are two components which cannot mean the same thing. If the Spirit is the word and works through the word (Ephesians 6:17), then “born of water” cannot mean “born of the word.”

He also called attention to a statement in Romans 1:16: *“The gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth.”* Yes, the gospel is the power of God to save the believer. The believer is not already saved, or else the gospel would not be the power to save him.

In Acts 2:38, we read *“Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”* And on this verse, Victor says, *“their sins were already forgiven by **their repentance and faith** in Jesus Christ. It wasn't the baptism at Pentecost that washed away their sins, it was only an outward testimony of the forgiveness of sins they had received.”* In the first place, I am wondering why he includes repentance as part of the salvation process when he has been contending all along that only faith in God is required to be saved. If repentance is included in the process a man must take to be saved, **then the argument that one is saved by faith only, is nullified.**

Secondly, after Peter said those words in Acts 2:38, he said in verse 40, *“Be saved from this perverse generation.”* Were they saved before he commanded them to be baptized? Victor says “yes.” Then why did he afterward say, “Save yourselves...” or “Be saved...?” If they were saved before he commanded them to be baptized, why did he afterwards say, “Save yourselves?”

Thirdly, the expression “for the remission of sins” is

from the Greek phrase *“eis apheresin amartion.”* Let me give a similar expression in Matthew 26:28, where we find that Jesus says, *“For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many, for the remission of sins.”* There is the very same phrase *“eis apheresin amartion.”* One is *“Be baptized eis apheresin amartion”*—for the remission of sins, and the other is, Jesus shed his blood *“eis apheresin amartion”*—for the remission of sins. Now, if it means *“on account of remission of sins”* in one place, it would certainly mean it in the other. There is not a Greek scholar on earth who will say that these two expressions do not mean the same. If Victor knows of any, let him bring them up.

Now, did Christ pour out His blood because people's sins have been forgiven, or in order that people's sins might be forgiven? If Victor says that He poured out His blood because of the forgiveness of sins, he says that sins were forgiven before Christ shed His blood, and we know that the Bible does not teach that, and when he says that Christ shed His blood to obtain the forgiveness of sins, then he must say that baptism is in order to obtain the forgiveness of sins, because it is identically the same phrase without any difference. You see that the argument that baptism has nothing to do with their salvation is flawed!

And then, coming to Acts 22:16, we read, *“Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling upon the name of the Lord.”* Paul was told to get baptized so as to have his sins forgiven. And the only way to get away from this plain truth is for Victor to say *“Saul was forgiven and saved the very moment he met Christ on the Damascus road and believed on Him.”* I deny this! Ananias was asked to go tell Paul **what he must do** (Acts 9:6). And Paul says what he did was to get



baptized and have his sins washed away. Besides can one imagine that Paul believed on someone when no one has preached to him about that individual? Jesus did not preach to him on his way to Damascus. Then how can Paul have believed on Him whom he has not heard? How can one hear without a preacher? (Romans 10:14). The only way to attempt to get out of the statement in Acts 22:16 is simply to deny the text. The passage is however clear enough to be understood by anyone with an open mind.

“Arise and be baptized, and wash away thy sins.” Arise, number one, *be baptized*, number two, and *wash away thy sins*, number three. Notice how nicely it fits the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. *Death*, number one, *burial*, number two, and *resurrection*, number three. Resurrection comes on the side with remission of sins. Life is on the side with resurrection. When you put newness of life before burial you change God's order.

In 1 Peter 3:21 we read *“The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), by the resurrection of Jesus Christ...”* One would not have to make much change in that statement to distort its meaning. Peter said, “Baptism doth now save us.” All you need to do is just to take the word “now” and erase that “w” and put a “t” in its place, and you will have exactly the teaching of Mr. Victor; “Baptism doth not save us.” But that is not what Peter said. Nobody has the right to make that change. The fact is that Peter says now baptism saves us.

Mr. Victor wrote: “The waters of the flood point to judgement (in that they resulted from the sins of the world) and salvation (in that they offered a means of deliverance through the ark)... There is an

inward spiritual cleansing that is experienced by only those who have received Christ's forgiveness. Baptism itself doesn't remove sin; it's simply a symbolic testimony of an inner cleansing that has already occurred” (Emphasis Mine). However, under the new covenant, Mr. Victor posits the subject is delivered or saved without the water of baptism contrary to inspiration. He admits a spiritual cleansing takes place but asserts such occurs before baptism. Well Peter, under the unction of the Holy Spirit teaches otherwise!

Conclusion

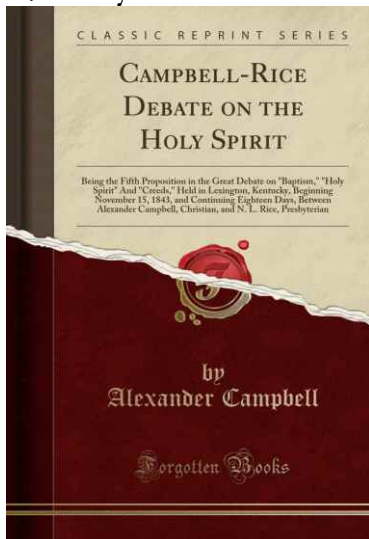
The grace of God that brings salvation actually teaches us TO DO certain things (Titus 2:11-12). Also, the faith that saves is the faith that obeys. Belief, repentance, confession and baptism are the conditions that we must meet in order that Christ might make us righteous. Repentance is faith turning, confession is faith speaking, baptism is faith obeying the Lord to be brought into a dynamic union with Jesus and it is a part of the process of salvation by faith and a part of the process by which we are made righteous. Thus, in the Christian age, those who are justified by faith are people who have been baptized. If you want the heavens to be opened unto you (Matthew 3:16), if you want the Spirit of God to come upon you (Matthew 3:16), if you want God to call you His child (Matthew 3:17; I John 3:1) and if you want to have access to God in prayer (Luke 3:21-22), you have to be baptized! Even Cornelius' household was baptized in water for the remission of sins, their baptism of the Holy Spirit was to show Peter and his companions that God would accept or save the Gentiles. Thank you.

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QUIBBLES THAT BACKFIRED

This section tagged “Quibbles that Backfired” deals with interesting statements and arguments that have been made by people during discussions by way of defense in attempts to justify and sustain their position regarding the subject involved. Some of these quibbles backfired in that the termination of it showed the complete incongruity of the statement made. Others backfired because they reverted upon the person who made them and put him in the very same predicament in which he intended to put the other fellow.

Alexander Campbell was debating N.L. Rice in Lexington, Kentucky in 1843. During the Campbell – Rice debate, two women were talking. One said, “We can plainly see that Mr. Rice is the most learned of the two, look at the books he has on his table.” The other lady said, “They were all written by Alexander Campbell.”¹



In 1916, a 19 year old boy, Curtis Porter debated a notable Baptist preacher, D.N. Jackson near Monette Arkansas. Concerning John 3:5, Mr. Jackson said, “There are only three things born of water: a frog, a mosquito and a Campbellite.” Porter said in response, “Mr. Jackson, it happens to be that I know that the very act which makes one a Baptist is immersion in water. That is the final thing that puts a man into a Baptist church. The Baptists therefore are born of water. You say there are only three things born of water: a frog, a mosquito and a Campbellite. I know you are not a Campbellite. I want to know which are you? A frog, or a mosquito?”²

Robert Ingersol was debating a denominational preacher on the existence of God. Ingersol, an atheist, got up and read Acts 2:38, and said to the preacher, “Do you believe that baptism is for the remission of sins?” “No,” said the preacher! Ingersol said, “Why you don't believe in the Bible anymore than I do! Why are we even debating the existence of God?”³

In the year 1919, W. Curtis Porter met Jim Cobbin, a member of the Baptist church near Formosa, Arkansas. It was a brief debate concerning the subject of baptism as a condition of salvation. During the course of this discussion, Cobbin mentioned that there are three church ordinances which he called baptism, the Lord's Supper, and foot washing. He said, “Now, Porter would cut off one of the dog's ears. He wants to do away with the foot washing.” Porter said in reply, “Well, all normal dogs I ever saw had just two ears. And I suppose if you had a dog with three ears one of them ought to be cut off, because he would be an abnormal dog.”⁴

Brother J.M. Powell tells the story of John Gerrard who attended a Billy Graham crusade in Hamilton, New Zealand. Graham announced one night that his sermon topic would be on Repentance. Billy graham used as his proof text Acts 2:38. He repeated the first word, repent. John Gerrard who was within only a few feet of the speaker stood up and said, “Why don't you read all the text Mr. Graham?” Graham

apparently irritated said, "Why don't you get out of here you old church of Christ man?" The man had never heard of the church of Christ but found a local congregation in the city and was taught all of Acts 2:38 and was baptized. Here was a man rebuked because he wanted all of the verse read and taught. If believing the Bible and wanting to hear all of the Bible taught makes one a member of the church of Christ, then all men need to become a part of Christ's church!

⁵

In his debate with W. Curtis Porter in 1934, F. S. Gibson (trying to downplay the necessity of water baptism), brought a bottle, took a dirty handkerchief and placed it in the bottle and he sealed it. He took a pan of water, and he dipped the bottle in the water, brought it up out, and the handkerchief was still dirty. He said, "You wash the outer man to cleanse the inner man, but it cannot be done. Dip it a hundred times if you want to, take it up, and the old handkerchief in the bottle is still dirty; the inner man is still unclean. You cannot do it by water." In response, Porter said to Gibson, "Will you please put that bottle on the bench and pray for it?" ⁶

W. Curtis Porter met Ben M. Bogard in a debate in Hubbard, Oklahoma in 1940 (Bogard is one of the greatest Baptist debaters that ever lived). During the course of their debate Bogard made this quibble regarding baptism. In comparing it with Jesus Christ, the Son of God, he said, "Christ was the son of God before his burial. The Lord was not buried to make him a son of God. He was already a son of God before he was buried. Therefore we are sons of God before we are buried in baptism." Porter responded, "Yes, Mr. Bogard, Christ was the Son of God before he was buried. But He was also the Son of God before he was crucified. Were you?" ⁷

Concerning the subject of apostasy, Baptist preachers hold the view that it is impossible for a child of God to fall from grace. They teach that once saved is always saved. In his debate with Ben Bogard and other Baptist preachers, Curtis Porter asked; "Is it possible for a child of God to get drunk and commit murder?" The response was that "God would not allow a child of God to die while he is drunk." In reply, Porter said; "If you want to live forever, become a child of God, get drunk and stay drunk. If you will do that, even an atomic bomb could not kill you." ⁸

References

¹John Stacy (1986). Exhort Brother. Houston: Firm Foundation Publishing House. Pg.88

²W. Curtis Porter. Quibbles that Backfired. A Series of Three Sermons Delivered at the Florida College Lectures. Pg.2

³John Stacy (1986). Exhort Brother. Houston: Firm Foundation Publishing House. Pg.90

⁴W. Curtis Porter. Quibbles that Backfired. A Series of Three Sermons Delivered at the Florida College Lectures. Pg.18-19

⁵Gospel Advocate – Aug. 14, 1975

⁶W. Curtis Porter. Quibbles that Backfired. A Series of Three Sermons Delivered at the Florida College Lectures. Pg.21

⁷W. Curtis Porter. Quibbles that Backfired. A Series of Three Sermons Delivered at the Florida College Lectures. Pg.5-6

⁸Ibid

CHURCH HISTORY

The First Church

By Sylvester A. Imogoh

From authentic biblical history and records we can be sure that the Roman Catholic Church is not the first church. Rather, we know that Catholic was the first denomination – that is, the first among the churches started by men.

Introduction:

If you look around you in any town or city in Nigeria, you will definitely notice the multiplicity of churches all over the place. Church denominations are simply EVERYWHERE! On one Street, you can find several church's sign boards. Sometimes, in one house, one church is downstairs and another is upstairs. Some authorities have reported that there are now over **40,000** different religious denominations all over the world. And the number continues to grow!

There are some questions that are begging for answers relative to this subject: Have there always been these many churches? Was there a first church? Was there a time when there was only ONE CHURCH? **Which is the first Church?** When did churches begin to multiply? Why Are There So Many Churches Today?

The First Church:

The idea of a first Church seems funny if not stupid to some people. Many cannot look beyond the teeming denominations of today to the New Testament which records the history of Christianity. The idea of a first Church is like the first car. Today, there are different makes, models and makes of cars. Some cannot imagine that there was a time when there was only one car, and it was simply called 'The Car'. It took years before companies and manufacturers began to replicate and duplicate cars. Today, we have too many to choose from.

In a sense, the history of the Church is like that of cars.

Very fortunately, the history of True Christianity is clearly recorded in the New Testament. Therefore, we do not have to ask man's opinion about the church. Authentic biblical records reveal that:

- ❖ Jesus promised to build His Church – (**Matt. 16:18-19**).
- ❖ He laid the grand plan – teaching His disciples; and later He sent the Holy Spirit as Guide (**John 14:26; Luke 24:49; John 16:13; Acts 1:8**).
- ❖ The disciples followed the Master Plan – they went everywhere preaching the word and gathering followers – (**Mark 16:19-20; Acts 8:4,12**).
- ❖ The Apostles and Prophets were the foundations of the Church, while Christ Himself was Chief Corner Stone – (**Eph. 2:20; cf. Acts 4:11; I Pet. 2:6,7**).
- ❖ This Church began in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. On this day, the Holy Spirit came upon the Apostles, (**Acts 2:1-4**); they Spoke in tongues and taught the people – causing them to repent and turn to Christ (**Acts 2:13-36**). Those who gladly accepted the saving message were baptized – about 3,000 the same day! (**Acts 2:37-41**). Those baptized were added to the body of the Apostles and disciples, and were called “The Church” (**Acts 2:42-47**).

This is the simple, but authentic history of The Church of Christ. At this stage (and for many years to come), there was only One Church. There were no denominations!!! There were no different churches for anyone to choose from – as we have them today. This is why Paul could write to the Ephesians and say

“There is ONE BODY” (Eph. 4:4,5 cf. Col. 1:18,24; Eph. 5:23).-Louise Rushmore

- ❖ This first Church began to spread – beginning from Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, on and on (Acts 1:8; Acts 8:4).
- ❖ The different congregations in different cities were all simply known as “churches of Christ” (Rom. 16:16; Col. 1:23).
- ❖ These various congregations preached the same thing (I Cor. 4:17; 14:33); believed the same thing (I Cor. 1:10); and worshipped the same way – receiving the same instructions through inspired writers (I Cor. 16:1-2). For a long time, Christianity remained united, and undivided with no denominations, such that Paul could say “There is One Body ... One Spirit... One hope... One Lord... One faith... One baptism, and One God (Eph. 4:4-6).

How Departures Came

Before the close of the first century, the Holy Spirit predicted that many will fall away from the faith and go in different religious ways:

I Timothy 4:1-2: “*Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times, some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their conscience seared with a hot iron*”.

2 Timothy 4:3-4: “*For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers, and they will turn their ears away from the truth and be turned aside to fables*”.

For hundreds of years, there was only one church on earth. It was the church promised and built by our Lord Jesus Christ. This One Church was described in

the scriptures as: “The Church of God” in **I Cor. 1:2**; “The House of God” in **I Cor. 2:15**; “The churches of Christ” in **Rom. 16:16**. At this time even the oldest denominations had not yet started: The Catholic started in *AD 606*; **Lutheran** – *AD 1530*; **Episcopal (Anglican)** – *AD 1534*; **Presbyterian** – *AD 1536*; **Baptist** – *AD 1611*; **Methodist** – *AD 1739*. These and all other man- made churches and names did not yet exist. However, in fulfillment of the prophecies of the Holy Spirit, with time, men began to show dissatisfaction with the pattern and plan from God for church organization. In time, some churches started to deviate from God's pattern. These deviations started from the leadership as predicted by Paul in **Acts 20:29-32**. This led to the emergence of denominations. The first of such denominations was the Catholic Church – which started in Rome. And later, with obvious corruptions in The **Catholic Church**, other groups rose to 'Protest' the Catholic deviations from the right way. These were later called '**Protestant Churches**'. These 'Protestant' denominations in turn continued to divide until we now have over **40,000** different religious denominations all over the world.





Some Important Features of the First Church:

From authentic biblical history and records we can be sure that the Roman Catholic Church is not the first church. Rather, we know that Catholic was the first denomination- that is, the first among the churches started by men. Now let us make the following points to underscore the above assertion:

1] The first church was not a denomination. Jesus established His church hundreds of years before any denomination existed. [Eph3:9-11] Denominations represent divisions. God hates division and pleads for unity in His church Jn 17:20-23; Eph. 4:3-6; 1Cor 1:10-13.

2] The first church was predicted through the prophets and was established according to those divine prophecies. [Isa. 2:2-3; Dan 2:44; Mk 9:1; Lk 24:49].

3] The first church was started in Jerusalem – exactly as the prophets foretold it. [Jer. 31:31-32; Joel 2:28; Acts 2]. Please read Romans 1:15 and notice that Paul had it in mind to go to preach the gospel in Rome. Christianity had started in Jerusalem before the gospel ever got to Rome. Therefore the first church was not and cannot be the Roman Catholic Church.

4] The first church has Christ as the Founder, Head and Savior and not the Pope nor any other man. Mat. 16:18; Eph. 1:22; 2.20; 5:23; Col. 1:18. Christ has recognized no other foundation 1Cor 3:11; Acts 4:12, Mat 15:9.

5] The first church follows Christ's doctrine in the New Testament and not some liturgy or manuals or any of the creeds and dogmas made by men. 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2Jn 9.

6] The worship of the first church follows the

organization, terms of entrance which includes water baptism by immersion [and not sprinkling]; weekly communion, and married bishops [and not celibate priests]. Act 2:42; 20:7; 1Tim 3:1-13.

7] The first church has no headquarters on earth, but in heaven where the Founder and Head is [Mat. 16:18; Eph 1:22; Rom. 8:34; Col. 3:1]. Rome is the Headquarters of the Catholic Church. All the man made denominations that originate in Nigeria have their headquarters in many towns and cities in Nigeria.

8] The first church is a spiritual edifice and not a religious cum political superstructure such as the Catholic Organization. The church of Christ which is God's Kingdom on earth is made up of men and women- who are living stones, a holy priesthood, and a spiritual house. 1Pet 2.5-9.

9] The first church was also described in the New Testament as: the Kingdom – Col. 1:13; the Body- Eph. 1:22, the house of God-1Tim.3.15; the church of God -1Cor 1:2; and the church of Christ –Rom 16:16

10] Therefore, the first Church cannot be the Catholic Church nor any of the teeming denominations in the world today. The First Church is the Church of Christ!

Conclusion:

How To Become a Member of the church of Christ includes- faith, repentance and baptism in water for the remission of sins. [Mk 16:15-16; Act 2:38; Rom 15:1-4] A warm welcome awaits you always in any service of the church of Christ.

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INSTITUTIONALISM

Helping God

By Julius Egharevba

No human being is eligible to help God, but simply to obey. God will not just accept anything because we zealously engage in it. He does not need our help in any form. We as humans should seek to know His will and do it.

“Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God” (Rom 10:1-2).

In Job 22:2, Eliphaz, one of the friends of Job asked a rhetorical question; “Can a person do anything to help God? Can even a wise person be helpful to Him” (NLT). Indeed, it must be said that no one on earth can help God; rather, we are to obey God. Several passages in the Divine record affirmed that man is to obey God because He is our God, He created all things and has need of nothing, He is eternal, Almighty from whom all good and perfect gift comes (James 1:17). Jesus said that “If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.” (Jn. 7:17).

The Bible gives account of certain individuals who tried to help God and the tragic result of such endeavour as well as the disastrous end of such people. One of them is King Saul. On two occasions, he made mistakes thinking he was helping God, or perhaps doing God a favour. Of course, that resulted to his rejection from being king. As a king, he is not expected to perform the work of offering but the priests (cf. II Chronicles 26:18). He was instructed to wait for a priest to offer burnt offering before he could embark on a fight with the Philistines, but he personally offered burnt offering. It happened that

Samuel the priest was delayed to get to Saul for a reason not stated. When Samuel confronted him for such action, he said, “I forced myself therefore, and offered a burnt offering.” In response, Samuel said to Saul, “Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of the LORD thy God, which He commanded thee: for now would the LORD have established thy kingdom upon Israel forever. But now thy kingdom shall not continue...” (1 Sam. 13:12-14). In the second instance, God commanded King Saul to go and smite Amalek: “Thus saith the LORD of hosts, I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt. Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass.” (1 Samuel 15:2-3). King Saul spared some animals **with the intention to sacrifice them unto God.**

In verse 22, Samuel said to him; “Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, He hath also rejected thee from being king.” Man is to obey God, because God does His work without the assistance of any man. King Saul lacks the knowledge of God.

Another gallant soldier who died for disobedience was Uzzah. The ark of the LORD was in the country



of the Philistines seven months, and it has to be brought back to Israel. Uzzah was one of the thirty thousand chosen men to perform that task. “And they set the ark of God upon a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab that was in Gibeah: and Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, drave the new cart, and they brought it out of the house of Abinadab which was at Gibeah, accompanying the ark of God: and Ahio went before the ark...And when they came to Nachon's threshing floor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God” (II Sam. 6:7; I Chron. 13:7-14)



Every rational fellow would ask, what is wrong, what sin did he commit when he wanted to prevent the Ark of God from falling? God answered the question, “HE DIED FOR HIS ERROR” (II Sam 6:7). He has a good intention, but lacked knowledge of the word of God. Jn. 7:17.

Men rejoice, glorify and justify denominationalism. They think they can as well establish one because God established His Church through his apostles. Therefore, the end justifies the means; since it is to win souls for Christ, any method adopted to achieve that, is acceptable. The very truth is that God has not given men authority to establish any Church than the one true Church already established. “For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (I Cor. 3:11).

Someone said sometimes that apostles helped God to preach the gospel of Christ, therefore, Christians are as well helping God by preaching the gospel. That is not true for we are only obeying God's command given in Matthew 28:19 and Mark 16:15-16 “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Matt. 28:19). This is the great commission.

No human being is eligible to help God, but simply to obey. God will not just accept anything because we zealously engage in it. He does not need our help in any form. We as humans should seek to know His will and do it. “Therefore, whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.” (Matthew 7:24-27).

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BARBS WITH A POINT

2 John 9 *“Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son.”*

The above Bible passage should cause us to pause and reflect on all human-made religious empires and organizations beyond the local church that usurp and replace the local church's simple organizational structure and work that the Lord has not commanded (Eph. 3:10; 1 Tim. 3:15). The admonition in 2 John 9 should not be difficult if not that many Christians have little appetite for spiritual things because they are already gorged with the world's junk food (James 4:4). When the church seeks to be identified with the world, apostasy begins. Thus, trying to “keep up” with the denominations is already leading the church away from the divine pattern (Gal. 1:6-10). Certainly, the quality of our love for the Lord will determine the intensity of our disdain for lack of scriptural authority in all we do.

Upon a profound reflection on having respect for God's word, the following thought resonates from Deuteronomy, Proverbs and Revelation:

To take away from the word of God is to remove that which God has spoken. To add to the word of God is to interject that which God has not spoken. To diminish what God has explicitly said is to violate speaking where the Bible speaks. Besides, to add to God's word is to speak where God has not spoken and thereby contravene the silence of the scripture. Therefore, “to speak and be silent” are equally valid principles in the Bible (Heb.7:11-14; Deut. 4:2; 12:32; Prov. 30:6; Rev. 22:18, 19).

Rowland Femi GBAMIS

Quotes

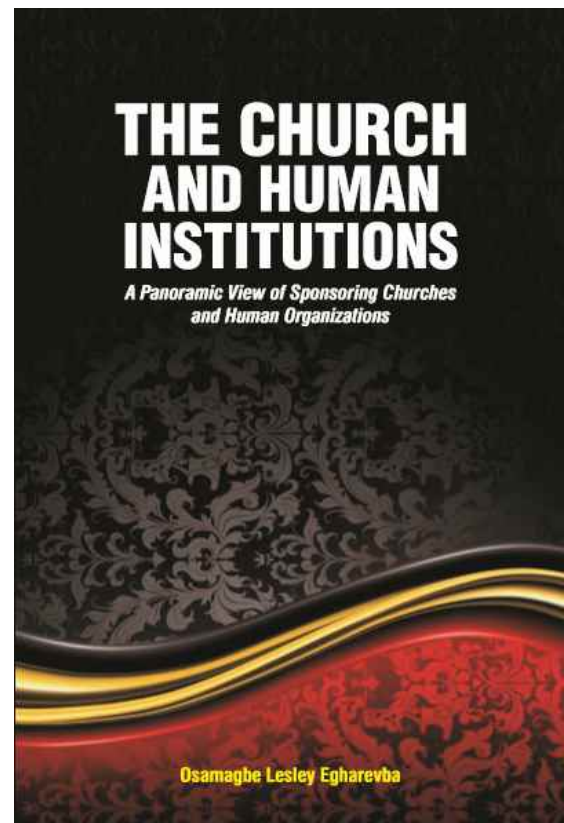
Our Lives Begin To End The Day We Become Silent About The Things That Matter – **Martin Luther King Jr.**

The Unexamined Life Is Not Worth Living – **Socrates**

To Wear The Name “Christian” Is Both A Privilege And A Responsibility – **Jerry Bates**

The Fool Says In His Heart, “There Is No God” – **Psalms 14:1**

When A False Argument Puts On The Appearance Of A True One, Then It Is Properly Called A Sophism Or Fallacy – **Isaac Watts**



An invaluable book on the church and Human Institutions. Contact the author at osamagbelesley1@gmail.com to get a copy.

IDEAL HOME

When Parents Fail

By Julius C. Nwankwo

Only a false religious faith permits a division between “belief” and life... If a generation only has knowledge of His commands and no love for His ways (this is where Christianity has degenerated into a mere religion), then the next generation will depart from those commands. How do we avoid this generational departure? Parents must pass on the fear of the LORD to their children and children's children. The Christian parent must do everything to pass on the heart and passion for the Lord as well as knowledge of the Lord's

Do we want good children or godly children? This question lies at the heart of our true desire for our children. In the midst of a secular society, it is easy to leave God out of the training of our children. For any child to be a “good” child he must be raised by God's truth, even if the parents do not acknowledge they are doing so. They enjoy His world, His gifts such as life and bodies but do not give any thanks to Him. This is the mark of the secular state that asserts it can run on its own. We want godly children who know the principles of good living but also who know God Himself. We desire for our children to have a love and passion for God that overflows in a love for mankind.

Without Jesus Christ, our ability to forgive, have compassion and to love is greatly limited. In Christ we have the ability to have Christ live His life in us. Our goals for our children must go far beyond what we can do in our own strength, which only feeds our pride. We must train our children to trust God and live a godly life in which they walk in His Spirit. There are many voices telling us how to parent, but the majority of them reject God's purpose for our children. Because many Christian families have bought into secular thinking, their children are living as immorally as the society around them.

Now is the time to change the course of history through our own families. God can do great and mighty things through a small number of families that

live by His great and glorious promises and purposes contained in His word – the Bible. In this session, we will first focus on God's principles for raising our children by mentioning some practical points on how we can implement these life-changing principles “For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice, that the LORD may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him” says the Lord (Genesis 18:19).

But God has also known and chosen you and me. Every single father, like Abraham, is known and chosen of God. Every single father, like Abraham, has an everlasting covenant relationship with God and therefore is one of God's separate, different people. Every single Christian father, like Abraham, is to be God's partner, God's fellow worker, in raising godly children “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.” (Proverbs 22:6) Every single parent, like Abraham, is a friend of God to whom God reveals His will – not in person, but in the Word, to be a faithful steward “Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.” (1Cor. 4: 2). Therefore, they must not fail or disappoint God.

For parents not to fail or disappoint God, they must:

1. **Establish and live by God's standards.** In Deuteronomy 6:1 God said to the children of Israel



“Now this is the commandment, and these are the statutes and judgments which the LORD your God has commanded to teach you, that you may observe them in the land which you are crossing over to possess.” In the chapter before this, the Ten Commandments were clearly given to the people again. God is holy; therefore we must do things His way in order to please Him. Therefore, we must know what the Lord says and then actually obey Him by doing just what He says. Moses taught the Israelites God's commands in order to help them live out godly lives among the heathen nations. Our standards must come from God's standards. As these commands have been taught to us, we need to teach them to others (especially our children).

2. Pass it on to next generations. “that you may fear the LORD your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, you and your son and your grandson, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged” (Deuteronomy 6:2). God wants us to think in terms of generations. We are not only to think of our children but our children's children. The “you,” “your sons,” and “your grandson” reflect three generations. This we saw in the lives of Timothy's grandmother and mother (2 Timothy 1:5), what we do with our lives greatly impacts the lives of the next generations. The “fear of the LORD” is the conscious presence of God, which influences our lives. Many people live their daily life as if God has nothing to say about how they should live. When God's Word has minimum impact on what a person does, we can say he is secularized even though he might be religious. The fear of God is no longer in his life. Our purpose is not just to pass down the LORD's commands but that our children might fear the LORD and keep His commands. Knowledge of His commands is insufficient. Knowledge must be

translated into life change.

If a generation only has knowledge of His commands and no love for His ways (this is where Christianity has degenerated into a mere religion), then the next generation will depart from those commands. How do we avoid this generational departure? Parents must pass on the fear of the LORD to their children and children's children. The Christian parent must do everything to pass on the heart and passion for the Lord as well as knowledge of the Lord's commands. On the positive side, if we live out godly lives before our children, they will most likely pick up that passion. We must be careful to instruct them about who the Lord is and all about His ways. Neglect of this will lead to a next generation that has respect for our ways but no power.

If we live compromising lives, then we live as if we are already in the second generational stage. Our children will, for the most part, leave the Lord. They do not believe because we do not really believe. Genuine faith always touches our life's priorities. Only a false religious faith permits a division between “belief” and life. Our children look at the goodness of our lives rather than what we say. They are right. If we do not live by what we say, then they see only our hypocrisy. This produces sad and bitter lives.

To be continued next edition.

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MYTH BUSTER

Is The Name Of Satan "Lucifer"?

By Emmanuel Oluwatoba

Although "Lucifer" is widely referred to as the name of Satan, it is a myth since it has no solid ground from scriptural evidence.

Satan is one character that has been given numerous titles throughout the bible. He has been called; The devil (Matt 4:1), Old serpent (Rev 12:9), Tempter (1 Thess. 3:5), etc.

But is his name Lucifer? Let's find out.

Isaiah 14 verse 12 says "How art thou fallen from heaven, **O Lucifer**, son of the morning. How art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations!" (KJV)

The word "Lucifer" is from the Hebrew word "Heylel" which means "light-bringer." This word refers to the star Venus, which is the morning star, which ushers in the light of the morning and shows that day is at hand. Very few English translations includes the word Lucifer (since Lucifer is a Latin word), with other renditions of this passage using phrases like day star or morningstar.

Does this passage refer to Satan?

This passage is not to be understood to refer to the fall of Satan and the apostate angels when they were cast down from heaven, but the words are a continuation of the speech to the king of Babylon, which commenced from Isaiah 14:4 "that you will take up this parable against the king of Babylon, and say, How the oppressor has ceased. How the attacker has ceased" (NHEB). The prophet Isaiah proclaimed many oracles against various nations: Moab (Isa. 15-16), Arabia (21:13-17), and Tyre (Isa. 23). etc.

The word "Lucifer" is not a name but the Latin word for morning star, which literally refers to Venus, but in ancient times it was used metaphorically of earthly kings to depict their influence and power. Lucifer as

used in Isaiah 14:12 is metaphorically taken for the high and mighty King of Babylon, who was a world power and has all nations in the palm of his hand. Such was glory and power of the king of Babylon. However in this passage, his fall was prophesied and likened to a fall from heaven. It is only by turning Lucifer into a proper name that misunderstanding have occurred as to meaning of the text.

Furthermore in Isaiah 14:16 we read "Those who see you will stare at you. They will ponder you, saying, "Is this man who made the earth to tremble, who shook kingdoms;" (NHEB). This passage shows that a man was being referred to in this prophecy.

WAIT! What about Luke 10:18?

Luke 10:18 says "He said to them, "I saw Satan having fallen like lightning from heaven." Like with all misinterpretation, the idea that Lucifer is a name of Satan is not entirely baseless, the belief that Luke 10:18 supports Isaiah 14:12 is the main catalyst of the idea. However Luke 10:18 has nothing to do with Isaiah 14:12. In context, we see that Jesus' statement was as a result of the victory of 70 disciples Jesus sent out and the fall was not referring to Satan's fall from heaven, but in regards to the destruction of his works. The phrase "from heaven" refers to lightning and not Satan. Jesus here was trying to illustrate the speed of Satan's fall, likening it to a lightning from heaven.

Although "Lucifer" is widely referred to as the name of Satan, it is a myth since it has no solid ground from scriptural evidence.

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SALVATION



Total Depravity: Are babies born sinners?

By David Olajire

The idea that children are born sinners was one of the errors of the Israelites in the Old Testament. What did God told them? Did He commend them for it or rebuked them? He rebuked them not just in one place but several places.

One of the erroneous doctrines propagated today is the teaching that children are born sinners. This doctrine states that all of humanity sinned in Adam when he ate the forbidden fruit, that Adam's sin, its guilt, and its curse were imputed to all his descendants, and that all of his descendants are now born with an Adamic sin nature which makes sin unavoidable and makes us "by nature the children of wrath."¹ This doctrine is also known as original sin, inherited sin or total depravity. This doctrine of children being born sinners had been accepted without any real justification.² Let us X-ray this doctrine with the Bible.

The Definition of Sin

What is sin? The truthful answer to this question will go a long way to make us understand that children are not born sinners. God, being a wonderful and omniscient God, gave us the definition of sin in His word. Even if the dictionary gives a different meaning to embrace the idea of some folks, the biblical meaning is what must be followed because it is the meaning God gave to it.

The Bible called sin:

A. Transgression: *"Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law"* (1 John 3:4). From this definition of sin, we understand what sin is and how we become sinners. This definition tells us that sin is transgression of law. Transgression is a violation of a law, duty or commandment.³ One transgresses by refusing to do what the law says. This implies that one must have had

the knowledge of the law. Does a new born baby have the knowledge of any law? No! Then a baby cannot be lawless. This definition also tells us that one becomes a sinner when one commits sin and not when one inherits sin. Has a new born baby committed any sin? Remember the definition says it is committed not inherited.

B. A refusal to do what is good: *"Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin."* (James 4:17). This definition tells us that there must first be knowledge of good and evil before sin can be committed. Sin is committed when after having that knowledge, one refuses to do good. God himself told us that children have no knowledge of good and evil (Deuteronomy 1:39). Should anyone dispute that with God? It is pathetic to see some people dispute it with God. They say, "Impute evil on the child!" But what does a child know? A child knows nothing. Can a child differentiate good from evil? Why accuse the little child of what he knows nothing about? Children are completely sinless since they have no knowledge of good and evil.

C. Unrighteousness *"All unrighteousness is sin: and there is a sin not unto death."* (1 John 5:17)

Unrighteousness is a choice (1 John 2:29; 3:7; 3:10). What choice does a baby have? Since sin is a choice and the baby has no choice, then the baby is not a sinner. The definitions of sin have made us understand that children are not born sinners because sin is committed, not inherited. These definitions are enough to destroy the idea that children are born



sinners.

The Error of the Israelites

The idea that children are born sinners was one of the errors of the Israelites in the Old Testament. What did God tell them? Did He commend them for it or rebuke them? He rebuked them not just in a place but several places. Not just by one man but two (Jer. 31:29-30, Ezek. 18). God made the point clear to the Israelites that a child does not inherit the sins of his parents. Everyone is responsible for his own sin. The Israelites thought the children inherit sin from the parents, just like those who believe children are born sinners think. If God rebuked them, telling them they were wrong to believe such, do you think He has changed His mind on the subject? His mind on it remains that children are sinless. One should not be like those who refused to obey or act as if they do not understand God. The Bible says “the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father” (Ezek. 18:20).

Jesus Taught That Children Are Not Born Sinners

We know from the Bible that anyone with sin is not fit for the kingdom of God. One requisite to becoming a Christian is repentance (Acts 2:38). To enter the kingdom of God one must be holy. To the matured, he said they should be born again before they can enter the kingdom of God (John 3:3-5) but to children he said “such is the kingdom of God” (Matt. 19:14). They need no repentance to enter the kingdom. They need not be born again. They are indeed innocent, sinless and pure. Jesus even went as far as saying the matured in mind cannot enter the kingdom of God except they be converted and become as little children (Matt. 18:2-3). What a blow on those who teach that children are born sinners! Jesus was saying except we become as innocent as children, we cannot enter the kingdom of God. Jesus himself taught that children

are sinless. Should we argue with Him or assent with him? I choose to accede with what Jesus taught that children are sinless.

Jesus – A Proof That Children Are Born Sinless

Those who propagate the false doctrine that children are born with sin get hooked by the neck like a hooked fish, when they get to the passage that says Jesus was sinless (1 Pet. 2:21-22). They find excuses to dodge it. Sometimes they say Jesus could be without sin because his conception was not natural. They forget so easily that one of the passages they misconstrue to support their doctrine will lash them because it says a man born of woman is unrighteous and not a man born of man (Job 15:14). Indeed since Jesus was sinless from birth. It indicates that all children are also born sinless. A very strong proof that cannot be denied!

Passages The Preachers Of This False Doctrine Use Wrongly

Sometimes some people interpret a passage wrongly because they fail to study diligently (1 Tim 1:6-7). Others do it willingly, wanting to take others to hell (Titus 1:10-11). Nevertheless, if it is done ignorantly or knowingly, it is a very big problem (James 3:1). The wrong interpretation of Bible passages is what has made the doctrine look like it is true. We will do well to consider some of these passages and understand what it actually means.

A. Psalm 51:5: “*Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.*” A mere view of this passage will make anyone conclude that children are born sinners; that is why diligent study is needed (2 Tim 2:15). Anyone who studies diligently, with open-mindedness will realize that this passage cannot be taken literally. If anyone wants to take it literally then such a person must take all other verses in the chapter literally, to be consistent. Read verse 7; does hyssop



wash our sins? Read verse 8; does God literally break our bones? If the answer to these two questions are no, it means you understand that they are figurative. Let us compare psalm 51:5 with Job 1:21. Can we say that Job 1:21 is literal? If we say yes, it means when we die we go back to our mothers' womb. Psalm 51:5 is as figurative as verse 7, 8 and Job 1:21. Then what was the psalmist saying? The psalmist was simply implying that he was born into a sinful world. So are we and our children.⁴

B. Romans 5:19: *“For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.”* This is another text used wrongly to prove children are born sinners. However, the text is clear. To understand this passage we must begin from where the discussion started. In verse 12, we can easily notice a division between Adam's sin and why everyone (excluding children) becomes sinners. We become sinners because we committed sin; “for all have sinned.” If anyone contends that this passage means children are born sinners, then such a one must agree that everyone born since the death of Christ is righteous. Anyone who does not agree to the latter is not sincere with the word of God (Titus 2:7).

C. Job 15:14 *“What is man, that he should be clean? And he which is born of a woman, that he should be righteous?”* This passage also cannot be taken literally. If this passage is taken literally, it means we must charge Jesus with sin and the Bible says Jesus had no sin. Do not forget that Jesus was born of a woman; and this passage asks how one born of a woman could be righteous. What does this passage really mean? Eliphaz was simply trying to tell Job that man can err and not that man was born with sin.

Effect of This Erroneous Doctrine

1. Anyone who teaches such is calling God a sinner.

This is because children are products of God (Isaiah 44:2) and a tree is known by its fruit (Matt. 12:33).

2. Anyone who believes such is saying the Bible is not true. The Bible in entirety is the true word of God (2 Tim 3:16). However when one believes children are born sinners, he has called God a liar because God, in his word, says sin is not inherited (Ezek. 18:20-21) and that man was made upright (Eccl. 7:29).

3. Anyone who upholds such is saying that God is unjust; and we know God is just (Rev. 15:3). If God is just He would not impute sin on a child who has no knowledge of anything. A mentally stable man can never imagine an innocent child in hell.

4. Infant baptism was introduced because of this false doctrine.⁵ This practice is wrong because believing is required before baptism (Mark 16:16).

Conclusion

It is pathetic that after having so many biblical evidences that proves children are not born sinners, some still teach, contrary to the Bible, the doctrine of total depravity. I believe we have established with enough points that children are born sinless. Let us believe only what the Bible teaches.

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Questions & Answers

Question:

Why do churches of Christ follow only the teachings of the New Testament? Is it that they do not believe in the Old Testament? Shouldn't they tear out the Old Testament from their Bibles if it is completely irrelevant? Why should they still read it?

Answer:

Churches of Christ believe in the Old Testament. In fact they believe it is authentic and inspired by God (II Timothy 3:16; II Peter 1:20-21). However, they teach that one must follow the New Testament teachings in the Christian dispensation because the Old Testament is not binding on Christians today since it was a shadow of good things to come (Hebrews 10:1). To teach that one must follow only the teaching of Christ as revealed in the New Testament is in line with the Divine injunction (Matthew 17:5) and this does not suggest a total disregard for the OT writings nor mean that those who uphold such do not believe the Old Testament to be God's word. The truth is that the Old Testament has its purpose and direct recipient. The covenant or testament was made with the Children of Israel in Horeb (Deuteronomy 2:1-3) and Moses stresses the fact that the covenant was not made with their fathers but with them. The covenant was not made with the Christians either.

The purpose of the Old Testament was to bring us to Christ that we might be justified by faith (Galatians 3:24). The Law came by Moses but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ (John 1:17). When Christ died on the cross, he nailed the OT to the cross and its purpose was fulfilled (Colossians 2:14). Christ took away the first covenant that He may establish the second (Hebrews 10:9). The change in priesthood necessitated the change of the law (Hebrews 7:12). The New Testament has made the Old Testament

obsolete (Hebrews 8:13). Churches of Christ still need to read it (and cannot tear it out of their Bibles) because it is still relevant to teach them the lessons of history, that they may learn from it (Romans 15:4; I Corinthians 10:6,11). Jesus is the only one we must listen to today and His words are recorded in the New Testament for us (Matthew 17:5; Hebrews 1:1-2; II John 9). The New Testament is God's complete and final revelation to man (Jude 3). It is the perfect law of liberty (James 1:25).

Question:

Does the Bible say anything about dealing with erring members of the church? Some churches do not really do anything about them even when they are aware of such misconduct among their members.

Answer:

Discipline is one of the identifying marks of the true church. The church at Corinth had a man among them who took his father's wife (I Cor. 5:1) which is sexual immorality. Members of the church were rejoicing in his error. The apostle, under God's inspiration, condemned this idea and told them; "And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have gone into mourning and have put out of your fellowship the man who has been doing this?" (vs.2, NLT) In verse 6, He said "Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? In verse 13, he said to put away that wicked person from among them. In the church at Jerusalem, we find a couple who died because of their sin.

These NT examples are enough to serve as template for all faithful churches of the Lord to emulate in handling erring members of the church. Churches should not cover sin nor rejoice in iniquity (Prov. 28:13; I Cor. 13:6).

Osamagbe Lesley Egharevba

ADDENDUM

COVID-19: When Situations Question our Faith

By Fashola James Oluwagbemiga

*Situations can make us ask questions about the creator or how genuine we are to what we claim to believe. Yet, there is a faith that does not **WAVER** in the face of heat, confusion, uncertainty, tension or pressure. It stays true in every situation and seeks to be more committed in the face of uncertainty rather than ask questions.*

Introduction

It appears that things are taking shape once again and the world may seem not to be what it went through in the past months. It is only those who were directly affected during the period that can tell what it was really like. The ones who lost something dear to them (loved ones, businesses, opportunities etc.) felt or are feeling the impact more. Chief of all these aftereffects of COVID-19 is the faith of many that has either been questioned or challenged. We may be forced to admit the fact that the “leaving pandemic” took and is still taking along the faith of some.

Besides trying to stay healthy, mourn the dead and protect others, the crisis represents an alarm that leads to a reflection on “where we sink the deepest roots that support all of us in the storm.” It reminds us that we have forgotten and neglected some of the important things in life.

Some have stopped being truthful to God, griped with fear rather than faith, stopped attending worship services, stopped caring for the needy, on and on we forget who we really are and leaving the avenue for Satan to milk us of our confession, trust, faith and assurance.

Definition of Terms

Faith: Is generally the persuasion of the mind that certain statement or thing is true. Its primary idea is trust; that a thing is true, and therefore worthy of trust. The Bible simply puts it thus “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things

not seen.” (Heb. 11:1).

Situation: It is the combination of circumstances at a given moment; a state of affairs.

Question: As used here, it is a doubt or challenge about the truth or accuracy of a matter. So we simply put: A doubt about one's truth in the face of circumstances (Prov. 24:10).

Question of Faith

When the “questioning of faith” is referred to, it can be in two (2) forms. Either one is asking some questions about what one really believes or what is believed encounter a challenge. Whatever the case, it is either COVID-19 is making us ask questions about our faith in God (Does He really exist? Why allow this mass destruction? Can He do anything about it?) or what one claims to believe is challenged within oneself (Am I true to my claim of faith? Do I allow the situation to bore hole into my trust in God? Am I practical?) And the questions continue.

COVID-19 busted things open, which ordinarily we were not conscious of. We have just been living a life but nothing has really “made us inquire” that faith! Matthew 8:23-27 gives a vivid illustration and example of the discussion at hand. The situation allows for the disciples to panic, forget who was in the boat with them, and DOUBT 'THE GOD'. After the calm and the question asked by Jesus, I am sure they must have carried out a self examination which later increased their faith in Him (The same is the situation with us).



Forces of Fear (2 Tim. 1:17)

When we say fear, we mean things that bring about the questioning of faith and what will snowball us to carry out some personal explanation at the face of situation(s).

(i) Panic: This is not to say that we become indifferent or ignore professional and public health expert advice. What we mean is fear and panic are not from God for they make us appear helpless and confused.

(ii) Care: Immediately we allow for doubt, our care for the things of God diminishes, since we are not sure 'HE IS'. We neglect the care for the needy in the face of the pandemic.

(iii) Prayer: Fear renders us weak in prayer, it appears no one is there to listen and as such, we leave things to chance.

(iv) Trust: It is easy to trust in the face of ease and assurance but most difficult in the moment of confusion and tension. Doubt in the creator and oneself break down the trust that is needed in moments and situations like that.

Forces of Faith (2 Tim. 1:12)

These help us to shut down the source(s) of doubting our creator and stir us to our responsibilities.

(i) Calm: At the face of panic that may want to eat us up, "being calm" in a moment of threat is a way to key more into our assurance.

(ii) Care: If we truly 'know' whom we are serving, we go deeper into our readiness to assist or care for the needy, knowing that one of the measures of our genuine faith and care is more about what pleases God (Matt 25:31-46).

(iii) Prayer: Faith alone will make us sense the

reason to take our fears and cares to him knowing that we (together with the world) are helpless and only a supernatural 'being' can help us. Him we turn to without doubt (Jm 1:5-8).

(iv) Trust: When situations arise, it is the most appropriate time to really measure our total reliance in whom we claim to believe. In the moment of unrest, confusion and tension, committing to his care and not chance is important since He is able and we can be firmer in Him (1 Pet 5:7).

The Schemes of Satan (2 Corinthians 2:11)

This shows us that the Devil is wise and powerful and no mortal can challenge him to a duel physically and win (save with help of the Spirit). Knowing this helps us stay on guard always for He uses divers scheme to fight us so that we be unable to attain that place of rest.

One of the best times he uses, in his wisdom and power is when we allow for questions about our faith and are off-track. He pushes us to break off from the demands of God and what pleases him, making best use of the moment, COVID-19 is not an exemption. We must not be ignorant of the fact that his mission is to rob us of the reward that awaits us if we are not careful and seek the help of God to help us overcome him, coupled with our effort (Jm 4:7-8).

Unwavering Faith (Romans 8:35-39)

Situations can make us ask questions about the creator or how genuine we are to what we claim to believe. Yet, there is a faith that does not waver in the face of heat, confusion, uncertainty, tension or pressure. It stays true in every situation and seeks to be more committed in the face of uncertainty rather than ask questions.

Such is the situation mentioned in Romans 8:35-39. Nothing at all should render our faith in God



questioned; rather it should strengthen us after we must have examined ourselves (2Cor 13:5). If truly we agree and can say along with Paul what he affirmed in Second Timothy 1:12, then we cannot be moved. The moment we 'know' whom we have 'believed' and we are 'convinced' He's 'able,' only then we will not waver at the press of the situation, come what may (COVID-19 inclusive).

Conclusion

During the heat of COVID-19, some who have faith carried on with the normal life both spiritual and physical activities (though with informed caution) in faith, which is the only avenue to key into God (Heb 11:1-6), some were unable to (Prov. 24:10).

The question is, were you one of those who could not hold on to faith during the heat of the moment? Hope is not lost. Only that there is much work to do and now is the time to start (2Cor 6:2).

Were you able to hold on with God's help when He perceived your love for him? Never feel comfortable (thinking the battle is over) or grow weary (Phil. 3:12-16, 1 Cor. 15:58).

Remember to stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour. (1 Peter 5:8, NLT). He gets best at it when situation(s) question your faith!

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THE 12 SONS OF JACOB (ISRAEL)

Jacob had twelve (12) sons, and in their names put together we find some interesting facts that point to Jesus Christ. It is so amazing how God hid all these wonderful truths inside simple names and stories.

Here are the names and their meanings:

NAMES MEANING

Reuben: Behold, A Son is born to us

Simon: One who hears

Levi: Attached

Judah: Praise the Lord

Dan: He judged

Naphtali: My Struggle

Gad: Good fortune

Asher: Happiness

Issachar: Reward

Zebulun: Honour

Joseph: Add to my family

Benjamin: Son of righteousness
(Son of my right hand)

When the names are joined together, this is what it says:

BEHOLD, A SON IS BORN UNTO US, ONE WHO HEARS US AND BECAME ATTACHED UNTO US. PRAISE THE LORD. HE JUDGED OUR STRUGGLES AND BROUGHT US GOOD FORTUNE, HAPPINESS, REWARD, HONOR; HE ADDED US TO HIS FAMILY AND CALLED US THE SONS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Jesus Christ is not just a mere name mentioned in sermons. Jesus is the content, the context, the text, the paragraph, the mark and the remark of the "Word of Truth."

Jesus is the outline of the entire Bible. And His "scarlet thread" of redemption links & runs throughout the Bible.

Author Unknown