



WHAT SEEMED RIGHT WAS DEAD WRONG!

“There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.” Proverbs 14:12

Some Things Just Seem Good

We should be careful to do what *is* right and not just what *seems* right, especially when handling the Holy.

Everybody has a “seem gauge,” but all too often, it’s out of calibration.

Some of the most destructive storms come only hours after a calm. Hence, the expression, “Calm before the storm.” Early in the morning, it *seemed like* it was going to be a picture-perfect day, but by afternoon, it proved to be disastrous.

Someone buys a used car. It *seems like* a really good deal at the time; but two days after the warranty expires, they find themselves in the shop with major issues. Their “seem gauge” proved to be out of calibration when making the purchase.

Many a gambler has felt good about his hand, only to end up bankrupt five minutes later. Many a partnership deal has gone south in only a few months. Many a marriage has ended up in divorce court within a few short years; and many a politician has been elected to office but then revealed to be a fake.

In like manner, we could say if something “looks good,” or “feels good,” or “sounds good,” then there’s probably nothing to be concerned about. But we know that’s not always the case.

Oftentimes when we default to our “seem gauge” it’s because, for whatever reason, we don’t do our homework. We go by our *feelings*, or by how something *appears*.

Thankfully, most things we get wrong don’t end up breaking the bank or ruining our lives. Some things that we take a stab at but miss just don’t matter; yet other decisions made on the same premise can be very costly, even deadly!

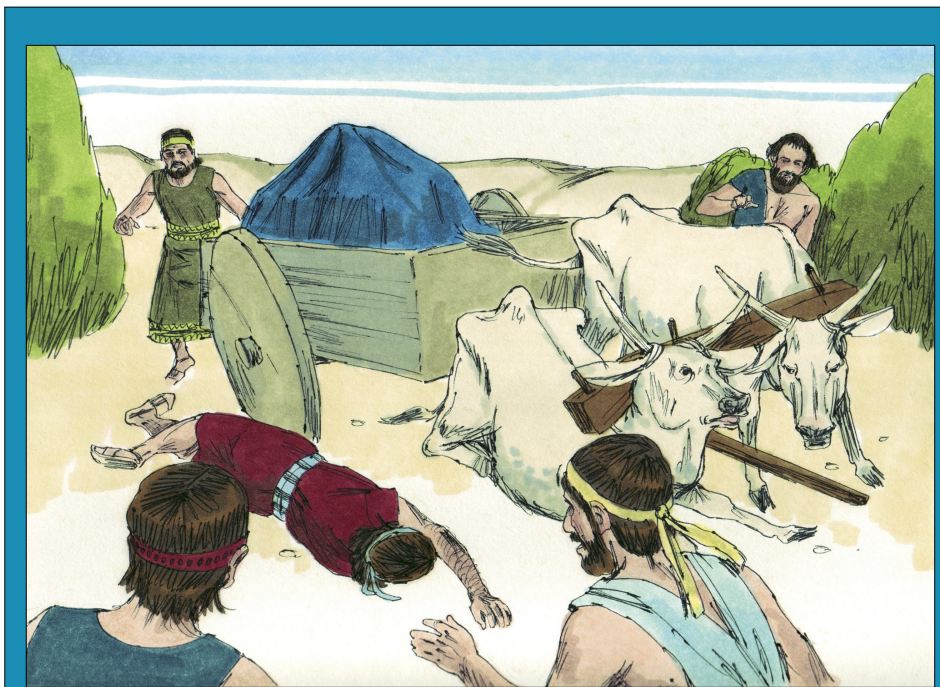
It is so easy to do so that we need to be reminded of this often, especially when it comes to the things of God - things we take too lightly, not considering that we may be trampling on Holy ground.

Such was the case with a man named Uzzah, when it *seemed right* for him to catch the Ark of the Covenant as it was about to go crashing down. His “seem gauge” was out of calibration - *way out* - for which he paid with his life! Read the story in I Chron. 13:1-12.

Is our “seem gauge” out of calibration concerning God’s Holy things? How important is it?

Some Ask, Why?

That we would ask *why* God judged Uzzah so harshly may demonstrate how far we’ve moved away from the *pure* knowledge of the God of the Bible. **The God of the Bible is Holy and cannot be touched by the unholy.**



“And when they came to Chidon’s threshing floor, Uzzah put out his hand to hold the ark, for the oxen stumbled. Then the anger of the LORD was aroused against Uzza, and He struck him because he put his hand to the ark; and he died there before God” (I Chronicles 13: 9-10).

He designed the Ark of the Covenant to be moved with poles so no one would ever have to touch it, and He warned that, because of its Holy nature and man’s unholy nature, anyone who touched it would die.

Uzzah’s sincerity didn’t spare him his life when he mishandled the Holy just one time.

Imagine how many times we’ve mishandled the Holy, considering even we are Holy.

It was over that Ark that His presence rested in the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle, and later in the Temple.

God’s sentence against Uzzah had everything to do with the unholy touching the Holy - something we clearly do not understand today, for which reason the Church is perched on the precipice of a wide-sweeping kind of cleansing judgment, and no one’s talking about it. Most name-brand evangelicals continue to say the rapture is next, but the Bible indicates that *may not happen until after God has done a cleansing work in the Church.*

We have been erroneously taught that, because we have been justified through Jesus Christ, anything we do *after* that goes - all because “we’re under the Blood.” The Bible does *not* teach that!

The Holy Spirit through Peter said judgment begins with us, and that it had already begun way back then (I Pet. 4:17). God’s judgment for His own is a disciplinary action of His love, with the intent of producing greater sanctification in our lives. The Apostle Paul wrote that “...when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned

with the world” (I Cor. 11:32). **God did not wash us and adopt us only to leave us to ourselves to grow dirty again and be condemned with the world; thankfully, none of His own are exempt from His correcting hand** (Heb. 12:1-11).

The *world’s* judgment results in condemnation (Rom. 5:16-18).

But because we are so tightly knitted together with the world, the judgment for the world affects us indirectly. Indeed, it has already begun with COVID, His two-fold judgments coming upon the earth!

Again, these early end-time world judgments that also touch the Body of Christ are used as instruments in the Refiner’s hand as His fire brings all our dross to the top for scraping away, yielding purer vessels. This is part of the big-picture end-time work God is doing to prepare His Bride without spot or wrinkle or any such thing (Eph. 5:22-33). We were cleansed by Jesus’ finished work and justified, yet God calls for us to *live* clean too!

God, the Great Divider

For almost a quarter of a century, I’ve shared with all who will hear that God is a Great Divider. Divine division precedes Divine peace.

- He divides His people from the people of the world to draw us unto *Him*.
- He divides His people from the spirit of the world to fill us with *His Spirit*.
- He divides His people from the ways of the world to teach us *His ways*.
- He divides His true people from the untrue in our midst - the wheat from the tares - to keep His family clean.

These new end-time troubles coming

upon the world reveal hearts - a necessary part of God’s plan as the Divine Divider. We are well aware that Satan is a great divider also. His work is clearly seen; but the overarching Hand of God is using all these things to make clear who “*is on the Lord’s side*” (Ex. 32:26). Satan is by no means in control.

Seldom ever do we hear about how our Lord came to send a fire on the earth to purify, or how He didn’t come to bring peace but a sword to divide. It began with His Word dividing hearts, and it continues with His Spirit as our Sanctifier. It is the imagery of the fire and the sword that we need to pay closer attention to as we watch these last chapters of these Last Days unfold.

Jesus said, “*I came to send fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how distressed I am till it is accomplished! Do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather division*” (Luke 12:49-51).

Preparing the Bride

The Baptism of the Holy Spirit does more than fill the believer for power to witness, although He certainly does that. The *Holy Spirit* is the Spirit of Holiness. John the Baptist said that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire (Matt. 3:11-12). The fire is for sanctification.

The Spirit of God abides in all believers, continually helping us “*put off the old man*” and “*put on the new*” - to grow us up into His image in *this* life (Col. 3:9-10).

The Bible teaches two kinds of sanctification: Positional and Practical.

1. The instant we are justified through faith in Jesus Christ, we have positional sanctification in heaven, giving us access to God and the promise of salvation.
2. In the same instant, back here on earth His Spirit begins a work of practical sanctification in us that helps us mature into Christ-likeness.

Practical sanctification comes by God working in and around us through several ways and means, including: by His Spirit within us (I Pet. 1:1-2); by His written Word as we partake of it (Heb. 4:12); by trials of our faith as we overcome (Jas. 1:3); and by other believers as we help each other in various ways (Eph. 4:15-16).

Now, more than in any other generation, I believe, He is doing a greater work of *practical sanctification* in our lives. Again, He’s preparing The Glorious Church for His Glorious Appearing (Titus 2:11-15)!

Let us not forget that, while our justifica-

“For He is like a refiner’s fire and like launderers’ soap.”
Malachi 3:2b

tion and sanctification in heaven have already been awarded by Jesus Christ alone, our *walk* with God in holiness, separate from the world, is something we have a lot to do with; and it is important.

"Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord..." (Heb. 12:14).

"...Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish."

Ephesians 5:25-27

His Sacred Assembly

From the first time God called His people out of the world unto Himself, He called His gathering a "sacred assembly" and a "Holy convocation" (Lev. 23:36).

That did not change with the passing of time, nor did it change between the Old Covenant and the New. God's called-out ones are, by identity, as much a Holy convocation today as when standing behind Moses at the foot of Mt. Horeb. We need to be reminded of that often.

We are not just a group of likeminded people who all "believe in Jesus," gathering to "worship" as we see fit. Believers in Jesus we are, and worshippers too; but our identity is also sacred and Holy.

I'm not speaking about false piety, but about real identity collectively. Among other things, the Bible identifies us as the Body of Christ about a dozen times! Is His Body not Holy?

As citizens of the world, we have distinct identities as well. Some are parents, some professors, and some postmen, etc. It is only natural that we play out the role of our identity. That works the same with our spiritual identity.

Notice how the Holy Spirit identifies us through Peter as the Body of Christ, and even through Moses as holy before Christ.

"Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

"But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy" (1 Peter 2:4-5,9-10).

"For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth" (Deuteronomy 7:6).

Until we see ourselves as Holy, we will still see ourselves as common or unclean and will be more prone to act like it.

One reason the Bible identifies us as saints is to help us walk even as He walked.

We are a sacred assembly, precious, a spiritual house, a chosen generation, a Holy priesthood, a Holy nation, a Holy people, and His "special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth." That should make us want to step up to the plate!

We are called out of the world though we still live in the world (Jn. 17:14-15; Rom. 12:1-2). Our job is to be mindful of the difference and then love the one and despise the other (Matt. 6:24).

In this, we have failed so often and have approved ourselves in doing so for so long that our consciences are insensitive to what God calls for. All seems well; but is it really? Our "seem-gauge" is way out of calibration!

Where are the *real* preachers in our time? They've been cancelled. The organized Church began cancelling *real* preachers long before cancelling became a worldly fad. Jeremiah is one who comes to mind. He was lowered into a pit because Israel's leadership didn't want to hear his uncomfortable declarations (Jer. 38:1-13). No matter that he was speaking for God. It's been that way in the Church too for nearly twenty centuries.

God told Jeremiah to separate "the precious from the vile" in his preaching (Jer. 15:19). The word "vile" means *anything that is not profitable to God's message - anything not of the Spirit*.

Despite our lack of discipline to separate the two, even in the pulpit, God has been extremely patient with us in this Age of Grace; but He still despises the mix.

The reality is that most Church leaders, large and small, old and new, take far too much liberty when leading the congregation - when preaching and teaching the Word. It's everywhere because it's a fad.

Leaders appeasing, teasing, and pleasing the members of God's "sacred assemblies" have always been an issue to some degree; but the level to which the spirit of this world freely flows today would compare as a mighty rushing river to a trickling stream of yesteryears. Its floodwater force is a modern phenomenon that is epic compared to that of centuries past.

Faithful preachers of the first nineteen centuries of church history would be shocked to hear casual remarks so commonly made from pulpits today.

What a poignant reminder that, truly, we are in the last chapter of The Last Days.

Holy Means Holy

Sometimes we act as though the simplest things are hard to understand. Such is the case with the word *Holy*. It's not hard for the one who *wants* to be Holy, but only for the one who *does not*. Holy means...well, Holy. It means "separate" too, but Holy carries a deeper meaning than just separate. A lot of things are separate that are not Holy at all. At best, most believers and organized churches may label themselves somewhat separate from the world - though it is blurred; but to label themselves *Holy*... not so often.

We all must live in the world, touch the world, and be touched by it; but none of us should bear the spirit of the world whatsoever; and we should avoid those things that appeal to the *soulish* man who is *unholy* and *wars against* all things *Holy*.

Our Lord said: "...you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world..." (Jn. 15:19b).

The Apostle John also wrote: "This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all" (1 Jn. 1:5).

Our excuses for integrating things created for the pleasures of this world into our assemblies are without Biblical defense. Every time we do that, we subjectively endorse and encourage them and further contaminate His Holy Body.

A casual approach in leading God's sacred assemblies is anti-theological to the ways and means God has specifically designed for us to experience a truly Spirit-filled gathering.

"God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24).

Co-mingling things of the flesh with the Spirit is an offense. We mix them, but they don't blend.

What a great travesty has resulted after having done this consistently from America's pulpits for decades. I'm afraid that our *general* understanding of what God calls Holy amounts to no *specific* understanding at all!

God set precedent more than one hundred times in the Old Testament, commanding His people to stay away from "unclean" things. Here's the sum of it:

"...distinguish between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean" (Lev. 10:10).

And in the New Testament:

"Therefore come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you" (II Cor. 6:17).

"Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are" (I Cor. 3:16-17).

Yet, all seems well to us. After all, God hasn't struck anyone down like He did Uzzah; but our "seem gauge" is way out!

Give attention to what A. W. Tozer said in his book *The Dwelling Place of God* about the way we conducted Holy convocations all the way back in 1946:

"That evangelism which draws friendly parallels between the ways of God and the ways of men is false to the Bible and cruel to the souls of its bearers. The faith of Christ does not parallel the world, it intersects it. In coming to Christ we do not bring our old life up onto a higher plane; we leave it at the cross. The corn of wheat must fall into the ground and die."

Tozer also aptly wrote: "Worship is no longer worship when it reflects the culture around us more than the Christ within us."

"It is scarcely possible in most places to get anyone to attend a meeting where the only attraction is God."

A host of other respected, God-honoring men of the last century voiced their concerns as well. They saw that the Church was becoming more *culture-centered* than *God-centered*.

Billy Graham has often been quoted as saying that he believed 85% of the church is lost.

W. A. Criswell (1909-2002), one of the most respected evangelical preachers of the last century, estimated that number to be 75%.

Vance Havner (1901-1986), a true modern-day prophet to the Baptists, estimated 65% of church members are lost.

B. R. Lakin (1901-1984), another highly respected Bible teacher and tireless proclaimer of Christ, said 75% are lost.

R. G. Lee (1886-1978), yet another outstanding Christ-centered preacher, said 50% of the church are lost.

A. W. Tozer (1897-1963), one of the most notable God-fearing communicators of the 20th century, believed 90% of church members are lost.

And the list goes on and on.

All would agree that only God really knows; but for half a century religious surveys have consistently revealed that the average church-going Christian is often confused and sometimes confounded about the God of the Bible; yet all are still ordered to "go to church!"

God's people should meet regularly as His Holy assembly, but where and when we meet is immaterial. We should seek for the place God would plant us, but not just to appease religiosity (I Cor 12:18).

Don't think it strange that healthy churches are rare, or that this assessment is overly critical; and don't think there are no churches worthy to attend. There certainly are.

But the Bible is full of prophecies about the apostasy of our time; and it is likely that, to one degree or another, this is true where you are as well. We need to be aware!

Even our Lord asked, "...when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8).

Individuals and churches move, think, believe, and act in mass, not critically.

We're quick to criticize and try to correct our broken public school system for turning out poorly educated students for decades, but most won't dare criticize or correct the root cause of a decades-old, poorly educated Church that is yet to yield hardly a glimmer of God's real glory!

That posture proves a greater loyalty to religious rules, pomp, and circumstance than it does to the God we claim to worship.

Jesus said, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore, be zealous and repent... He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (Rev. 3:19, 22).

Our New "Carts"

The way King David attempted to handle the Ark of the Covenant should make abundantly clear that we should *never* handle the things of God casually!

The shocking death of Uzzah should not overshadow David's error in the way he determined to move it in the first place.

God had clearly instructed Moses and Aaron about how the Levites were the only ones to carry the Ark, and on poles so as not to touch it, or they would die. That was five hundred years prior, and known to all, including David; but he ignored God's way and did what *seemed right to him* - a fatal mistake! Paul wrote that all these things are examples for us upon whom the end of the age has come (I Cor. 10:11), referencing how Old Cove-

nant Israel was immoral, suffering harsh judgment. He warned us in Christ that God is the same today, though patient.

Things created by the world to satisfy the natural man's soulish appetite are contrary to the Spirit of God by the very nature of their invention. This does not include all things that we enjoy, but only those things that fill soulish cravings.

It should not be difficult for the spiritual man to understand that things designed for the worldly man's pleasure, entertainment, and enrichment, when mixed with the Holy, will at best dampen its effectiveness; and at worst, will drown it.

We've been doing things that *seem right* for nearly twenty centuries; yet in the New Testament, God gave us sufficient instructions on all we need to know. Within His guidance, He obviously allows for liberty, for “...where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is [His] liberty” (II Cor. 3:17). But in many cases, we've gone way out of the bounds of His liberty, having left His instructions altogether.

More times than not, we do what seems right, following the traditions of our fathers, or new traditions or trends that make us “comfortable.” The church in Corinth got away with it, so we assume that our shortcomings really don't matter. But a casual, care-free attitude about the things of God doesn't sit well with Him.

As for doing it our way, we've come up with just about everything imaginable. My hope is we are almost out of ideas.

Our very best “carts” may *seem right* enough to us, but they're still not right to God, who is the only one that matters. He clearly taught us that His work, His will, His way must be by His Spirit and not by our doing “our best” (Zech. 4:6).

Estimates vary on how many organized churches there are in the USA. According to the National Congregational Study Survey, there were an estimated 380,000 churches in the USA before COVID. Many have closed their doors since then; but in any case, we'd be safe to say there are substantially more than 300,000 today.

The Christian Standard noted that the debt load of a mere 425 of those churches was \$850,000,000 (million) in 2018!

The summer of 2023, a notable Christian conference speaker, Nick Vujicic, revealed America's local-church debt load to be nearly 1/2 trillion (with a T) dollars (\$498,000,000,000 billion = 1/2 trillion)!

Most of us have been there, and not always by choice: but hopefully, we learn better eventually. However, that doesn't seem to be sinking into the mind of the organized Church, even with all its Christian financial advisors, accountants, and deep-pocket tithers.

Imagine the interest payments alone on that much debt being paid to the world's sinister banking system, either directly or indirectly - the same system that fights us daily. And that debt-dollar amount says nothing about the untold billions for new “carts” already paid for!

Let's be completely honest for a moment. Just imagine how many “new carts” we've built for ourselves (“all to the glory of God,” we claim) in order to maintain religious houses, systems, plans, and programs that, by our own confession, continue spiraling Christians down into Biblical illiteracy and up into an ever-shocking mix or alignment with the world!

Jesus called those who looked good on the outside “whitewashed tombs,” because on the inside they were “dead men's bones” (Matt. 23:27). We've built an awful lot of tombstone monuments, even in evangelical Christianity. Not all houses of worship should be labeled that way, for sure; but the spiritual point is important to see so we can honestly examine our mistakes, initiating fresh surrender.

Not a single building we've ever “built for God” has God inhabited unless His people were there. God doesn't “dwell in temples made with hands” (Acts 7:48). And He inhabits our gatherings large and small, with or without a building (Heb. 2:12).

Many things we've built “for Him” were really built for us, including *some* buildings! He'll gladly meet with us under a tree, in a house, or in a barn. Jesus preached from a boat along the shore and sitting on the mountainside. The first structure He ever entered was a stable - an example to show all His followers how to conduct ourselves in humility before the world, not in the regalia of religion. The world hates religious garb as much as God does (well, maybe not as much as God does).

Let's not forget that when the Holy Spirit came it was to an upper room of a large house! That's reasonable, since the Church didn't have buildings for the first two centuries. But again, He didn't come to a house only because there weren't designated Church meeting halls; but rather, that's where God's people waited on Him.

Unholy pulpiteers have subjectively taught at least two generations that there's not much difference between the church and the world.

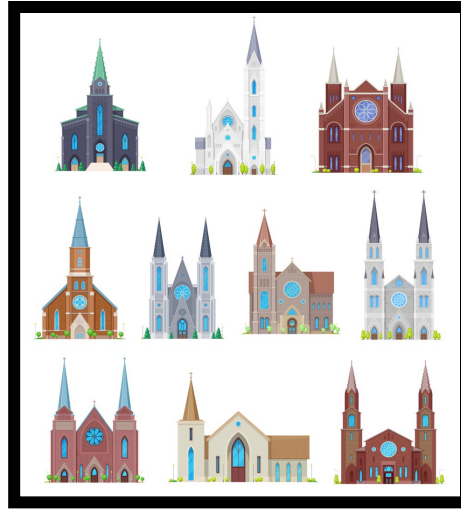
The mix of the world with worship is a modern invention seeded into our assemblies that has spread like cancer throughout the whole Christian community. Now, it seems ok.

We say that God is greater than we are, but in reality we keep Him on our *much* lesser plane - all under the false guise of making Him “relative” to the current generation.

Again, this reveals our poverty in understanding who the God of the Bible really is.

We've taken His message of power and glory into our own hands. We've made an idol.

What a pitiful God He would be if we were required to repack-age Him for each generation or cultural movement just so they could relate to Him!



The Spirit of God is no different today. He'll come wherever God's people will wait on Him. But we don't want to wait. We want to “create,” by our own understanding, an atmosphere that we think He will like, then talk ourselves into believing “we have met God” in our own arena.

For Him to be in our midst because we are His is one thing; but to *fall on us*, to *move mightily among us* as He would like to, is yet another. The former is easy; the latter requires stepping out of our worldly way into His heavenly way. We're content with the first option.

Of course, we need a shelter out of the elements. Homes are quite convenient and cost nothing more, and most everybody who comes to a church building has a house or a private dwelling of some kind. Many can share.

I'm *not* saying God hasn't used buildings. He certainly has, and does. I'm *not* saying He has *never* come alongside us when we built a building with right motives. He certainly has. I *am* saying we have prioritized wrongly for generations. This is one area of many in which we have been more Old Covenant-minded than New.

There is a day coming soon when the true followers of Jesus Christ will be pushed out of our buildings to worship on a higher plane and for His much greater glory. We will “neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father” (Jn. 4:21). For us today, “Jerusalem” would be our preferred meeting hall. We will worship Him in Spirit and truth like we've never experienced before with all our well-meaning, but often overrated, props.

Sinners or Saints?

Another root cause by which we grieve the Holy Spirit occurs when we identify ourselves as “just sinners saved by grace,” rather than as “saints.”

The Bible identifies true believers as “saints” approximately sixty times in the New Testament alone!

Should there be any wonder why we act like sinners, since many among us commonly identify ourselves that way from the pulpit to the pew and back?

God identifies us as “saints,” not “sinners.” This doesn't mean we don't sin, or that we should wear a “holy badge,” or be haughty. We have *zero* to boast about except the Cross of Jesus Christ; but it *does* mean that we identify as “sinners” no longer! This is an important step if we would ever overcome sin in our lives.

Only one time in the New Testament are saints called sinners by identity. That's in the book of James, where clearly they acted like sinners and needed correction.

“Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil

and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up” (James 4:7-10).

What a timely Word, when saints are looking more like sinners every day, by choice. In his time, James called saints “sinners” with the hope of turning them into saintly saints. Today, however, we call saints “sinners” to help them feel comfortable with their shortcomings, rather than uncomfortable.

If leaders will ever begin to speak like saints to saints, rather than like forever-bound sinners to forever-bound sinners, we could be on our way to living up to the God-likeness Jesus died for!

How We Got Here

For centuries, mainline divisions within the Church gave too much attention to *guilt* for sin, and hardly any attention to *forgiveness* for sin outside a right relationship with “the Church” and according to the Church's terms. The knowledge of forgiveness through Christ *alone*, and His *life and power in and through the individual believer*, was kept hidden. To allow the truth out of the closets of religion would have threatened their dominance over the people of God whom they treated as mere serfs. Hence, that is *one* reason we retained the identity of “sinners.”

The latest pushback from that came shortly after the turn of the twentieth century, when God began to move in response to desperate cries for real revival. Suddenly, through God's intervention, many of His people were awakened to realize the “*more abundant life*” they were promised through Jesus Christ alone. We sought for *true* liberty out from under any bondage imposed by the spirit of religion that had dominated the majority for centuries. We learned that through the gift of God alone, strengthened by the leadership of His Spirit, we can experience the *real* liberty He promised (Jn. 10:10; Gal. 5:1; II Cor. 3:17)!

This, of course, was a wonderful, heaven-sent discovery that eventually awakened Christianity all over the world.

Fast forward a few decades, and we see that the pendulum had swung the other way. We found that the true liberty rediscovered through Christ had grown to be interwoven with liberties of the world that do not align with our Christian liberties. This is something we are cautioned about specifically (Gal. 5:13-14; I Pet. 2:16).

After a brief dating period between these strange-bedfellow liberties that *seemed so right* for each other, a marriage was made. In the world of evangelical Chris-

Our newfound freedom in Christ for overcoming the world was soon overcome itself, when we united with the freedoms of this world at will, without discerning the difference.

We've come so far, we can't find our way back; and we keep on marching in the wrong direction!

“Seek the Lord, while He may be found. Call upon Him while He is near” (Is. 55:6-7).

tian thinking, the right to marry became "settled science." That unholy union was officially sanctioned by virtue of general acceptance. Christian "lords" (lords by way of the popularity scale) would oversee a new cancel policy for the Church - a policy that does not cancel common believers of past centuries *crying for* freedom in Christ, but one that cancels those today who *cry foul* because of *too many* freedoms - freedoms *way out* of bounds!

We were all taught that we could be tethered to some things born of the *spirit of the world* - the world that *manufactures sin* in wholesale quantities - and still enjoy the Christ-life to the full! With that, we fell into bondage to the world, feeling the burden, but not realizing why. It all *seemed so right*, but our "seem gauge" was out - *way out!*

In 1971, Billy Graham wrote:

"I would call the church back to biblical discipline. I would not call for a return to Puritanism with its legalism and excesses. However, we do need a new Puritanism that will lead to self-discipline, self-denial and a willingness to take up the cross of Christ, while at the same time preserving the great freedom that we have in Jesus Christ. The church has drifted into a dangerous antinomianism [error] - so serious that those outside the church can discern very little difference between the Christian and the non-Christian. The Scripture says that the Christian is to live a life separated from the evils of the world."

The separation between much of the Church and the World today is razor thin and in far greater peril than in 1971; but it all *seems so right*.

The Apostle Paul put it this way: "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any" (I Cor. 6:12, 10:23).

Paul didn't mean that literally *anything* we want to do is a sanctioned Christian liberty. If that had been the case, he would have been contradicting God's whole point in calling us out of the world.

Paul recognized his true liberty through Jesus Christ, but he also recognized that unless he guarded that liberty as something sacred, he might allow it to lead him out of sacred boundaries into a false liberty that would put him in bondage again.

In context, Paul was saying that while some things may be acceptable (such as eating meat offered to idols - since idols are fake anyway), we should be cautious about assuming liberties that are "not beneficial." Beneficial to what? Beneficial to the glory of God.

The main concern is that in our free-thinking evangelicalism, we allow ourselves all kinds of loopholes to avoid being a truly Holy people. We look for a way out of, rather than for a way into holiness. Through so much practice of the same, we have silenced our consciences; and absent of conviction, we say and do the things we want, participating in all kinds of things that hinder our true walk with the Lord. What *seems right* to us seems right not because it is right but because we've decided that it is right. Old Testament false prophets lied to God's people, saying He would not discipline them, but rather would give them greater freedom to exercise their own pleasures; and God said, "My people love to have it so" (Jer. 5:31). We commonly profane ourselves and our assemblies because we "love to have it so." It's a wonder that God

hasn't responded like He did with Uzzah, or with Ananias and Sapphira, whose story of abrupt judgment we find in our Age of Grace (Acts 5)!

Today, each one is doing what is right in his own eyes (Judges 17:6).

Everyone did what was right in his own eyes in Israel because there was no righteous leadership. Again, the *real* preachers today have been canceled like Jeremiah was, who was put into a pit.

We are in desperate need of righteous Christian leadership - men who proclaim God's Word with a sense of awe, conviction, and power - with a *sobriety* that we've not seen to any great degree in decades.

A few of God's *true* people are starving for someone who seeks to know God as He really is so he can proclaim Him as He really is. Other *true* believers, however, have learned to enjoy shallow, slapstick teaching from a spoon, and have lost their appetite for anything requiring a knife and a fork. Everything's dessert. There's very little spiritual nutrition! Some of today's leading speakers act like wannabe stand-up comics! In many ways, we are like those in Corinth, whom Paul

referred to as "babes," saying, "I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able" (I Cor. 3:2).

God Never Changed

We live in the Age of Grace. Uzzah lived in the Age of the Law (Jn. 1:17). Through both eras, God has never changed.

What God thinks about our treating the Holy as common has not changed. God does not change (Mal. 3:6). One story in the book of Acts makes clear that God reserves His right to judge swiftly and without notice, even in this Age of Grace.

Holy Glory Defiled!

The glory of God was present in a way that it had never been present before - even greater than in the Tabernacle in the Wilderness and Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem. To them, His glory was seen in "a cloud," and a sight to behold it was; but at Pentecost, His immortal glory literally invaded the mortal bodies of His followers! It had been nearly 1,000 years since His glory had filled the Temple. Those who truly longed for this promise were thirsty for a drink of *new wine!*

Almost immediately, 8,000 souls trusted Christ as Savior, repented by faith, and were baptized! Glory meetings were held day and night, resulting in many miracles, signs, and wonders like history had never witnessed! And brotherly love was *real!* Each one sold possessions to share with members in need, so that *no one* lacked!

Then, suddenly, in the midst of this unprecedented Holy convocation, a shock - similar to the one that had occurred with Israel at the death of Uzzah - shook the world of these New Testament believers too! A couple named Ananias and Sapphira *lied* to the Holy Spirit, and God struck them both dead! Their hearts were defiled and unashamed! Read Acts 5.

The shock was not so much from their sin; but rather from God's swift response!

God brought judgment upon the perpetrators of the unholy just as quickly under the Age of Grace as He did with Uzzah under the Age of the Law! *No one expected that!* *Everyone* gained a healthy and needful fear of the Lord.

God Made a Statement

At the outset of this new Age of Grace and truth, God revealed hearts and spoke a thousand words in one act of judgment. In summary, I believe He was saying: "Guard your hearts. I am a Holy God."

Isn't it quite telling that, for the hundreds of times we've rehearsed the story of Pentecost, we've hardly ever rehearsed this story of swift judgment?

Is that because it is not important? No. It is *very* important, but it is not comfortable for us. We don't know how to relate to it. It challenges us. It makes us afraid. Thus, we lose its meaning for our lives.

We go on about doing what *seems right* in our own eyes because it *seems* that we are getting away with it. But are we? Our "seem gauge" is out - *way out!*

God was setting a standard to be remembered for the next twenty centuries. We have long forgotten. Will He do it again?

Israel was so far removed from their former intimacy with God that they forgot *He* was not one of *them*. He was reminding New Covenant believers that, while He became one of us, He did not become like us. We are to become like *Him*.

It has been my conviction for twenty-five years that the Bible says God is going to revisit us with His glory and do a cleansing work that may shock us all. He's letting us exhaust ourselves of ourselves first. Surely, we're almost there! The fear of the Lord will return, and we will *want* to walk in *true* holiness, pleasing Him! *Then*, He will come to take His Glorious Church, His Spotless Bride, away!

Prepare for the possibility of the Refiner's Fire as we look for our Redeemer's soon return! Read Malachi 1-4 (a dual prophecy) with spiritual eyes for our time.

"Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near" (Lk. 21:28).

Mark and Debbie Case
The Father's Field Ministry
P. O. Box 330852
Murfreesboro, TN 37133

If you would like to help us share more messages, please contribute by mail, or through our website!

www.proclaimit.org



Billy Graham's Challenge for a Floundering Church

(an excerpt from *Decision Magazine*, 1971)

I have a friend who was called to be the pastor of a rather large church. When I asked him how he liked his new responsibility, he replied, "I haven't found the church yet. And if I don't find it within a year, I am going to leave."

Almost every minister will agree that there is a church within the church — that group of people, often a minority, in almost every congregation who have personally met the living Christ and can never be the same again... As such, the true church is a holy temple for the habitation of God through the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 2:21-22).

Therefore, within the vast complexities, bureaucracies, organizations and institutions of Christendom there exists the true Body of Christ. The members of this true Body are, for the most part, known only to God. They are the ones who have their names written in the Lamb's Book of Life (Revelation 21:27). They are scattered in all denominations, and many are in no denomination at all. They are the "called-out" ones. It is this church within the church against which Christ promised the gates of hell would never prevail (Matthew 16:18).

I was asked to write an article for a leading British magazine on the subject:

"What I Would Do to Change the Church."

I would like to list some changes that I suggested in that article.

First, I would call the church back to biblical authority. The Protestant church today is possibly as far from the authority of the Scriptures as was the Roman church in the 16th century. We desperately need a new reformation within the Protestant church.

Jeremiah the prophet charged the people of his generation, saying, "For you have perverted the words of the living God" (Jeremiah 23:36). In our generation the teachings of the Bible are being perverted by many churchmen. The authority of Scripture itself is being rejected. Thus the church is floundering like a ship at sea that has lost its rudder and compass. We are like a plane in heavy weather that has lost radio contact with the tower.

Second, I would suggest that every member of the church begin where the disciples began — at genuine conversion. Jesus said, "By their fruits you will know them" (Matthew 7:20). The very fact that the fruit of the Spirit, such as love, joy and peace (Galatians 5:22), does not characterize average professing Christians indicates that they have never had a genuine experience with God.

After preaching all over the world and observing the work of the church, I am convinced that there are great hordes of people loosely identified with the church for various reasons who have never experienced scriptural conversion. The distinguishing mark of Christ's disciples was that people could tell that "they had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13). Great sections of the church today have been rendered sterile and nonproductive because Christ's spark of divine light is not resident within them.

Third, I would teach the necessity of the infilling of the Holy Spirit...

Fourth, I would call the church back to biblical discipline...

Fifth, I would teach the centrality of Christ...

Sixth, I would call the church back to the thrill, excitement, joy & expectancy of the early church...

Seventh, I would call the church to a new relevancy. I would call the church to a proper perspective in coming to grips with the staggering social evils of our time...

I would start, however, from a spiritual point of view. Only a healthy church can help a sick world. Much social action today is nothing but sheer humanism. I am convinced that we cannot save the world until we ourselves are first saved. We cannot change the world until we as members of the church have been transformed by the power of Christ. We cannot redeem society until we ourselves have first been redeemed by Christ.