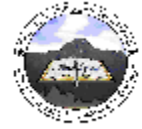




On The Frontier



“For The Glory of God and the furtherance of the Gospel”

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The True Vine

The disobedience of Adam and Eve put them in a sinful state, separate and apart from God. Their once beautiful and intimate relationship was now brutally severed by sin. A huge chasm now stood between them and God. With the light of His presence gone, deep and pervading darkness could now enter.

Genesis 3:7

And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they *were* naked [i.e. spiritually]; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons.

They vainly began to do what all men have done since. They attempted to repair the breach by themselves. That is, they tried to cover their spiritual nakedness with their own works. They should have realized that it was their own works which got them in trouble in the first place. But they, like so many of us, continued to give credence and adoration to the very thing that would destroy them, i.e. the works of man (religion if you prefer).

No doubt they were in earnest (religious efforts are always both robust and futile - see Mark 7:7,8; Romans 10:1-4; Colossians 2:16-ff, etc.) but nothing in their power could undo what happened or reconcile them to God. They had brought sin and death upon all mankind. Now man would be subject to evil and bear the burden of guilt and fear. Walking and talking with God was to be replaced by running and hiding.

Genesis 3:10

And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I *was* naked; and I hid myself.

Adam and Eve knew within themselves the nakedness brought about by their disobedience. This type of knowledge has been proven to be a terrible handicap to us Christians also. We know it as sin-consciousness.

This, combined with an inherent hunger to be joined to God, has motivated all of us at one time or another and that in varying degrees. These are two of the prime reasons for our vulnerability to religion. We seek to be satiated, to fill the void and numb the pain of our guilt. Misdirected though it may be, many are anaesthetized and made complacent by religion.

Religion is a confusing subject as it is intended to be. Most adherents cannot describe their own beliefs let alone another's. So it all remains a “mystery.”

Consider this record:

Genesis 10:8-10

And Cush begat Nimrod: he began to be a mighty one in the earth.

He was a mighty hunter before the LORD: wherefore it is said, Even as Nimrod the mighty hunter before the LORD.

And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, and Erech, and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar.

Nimrod was a mighty hunter before the Lord, meaning “he greatly withstood the True God.” The name Nimrod means rebellion which is exactly what the man did. He rebelled against God. His kingdom began at Babel, meaning confusion. Babel is the very place where the infamous tower was built, a prototype for religion. Consequently, we should not be surprised to find religion rife with confusing babbling.

Genesis 11:1-9

And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech.

And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they dwelt there.

And they said one to another, Go to, let us make brick, and burn them thoroughly. And they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar.

And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top *may reach* unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.

And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded.

And the LORD said, Behold, the people *is* one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do.

Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.

So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city.

Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the LORD did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the LORD scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth.

Many have taught that the reason God did this to them was because they built this tower so high. However, what they fail to realize is that this tower was being built so as to orchestrate a consolidated effort to worship the host of heaven, i.e. the planets, stars and zodiac. The builders at Babel had made the first full scale venture to organize "one world" religion.

Verse 4:

And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top *may reach* unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.

The words *may reach* are in italics, an indication by the translator that they were added to the text. If you read the verse without them you get the sense of dedication rather than height. Furthermore, they had an urgency for renown. This endeavor, with its accompanying concepts, was the prototype for all that leads men away from God in the name of "religion."

Revelation 14:8

And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen,

that great city, because she made all nations [*ethnos* = races] drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication [religious idolatry].

Revelation 17:5

And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.

Imagine that! The mother of harlots and abominations. Wow! That speaks volumes! All this will result and all was done in the name of religion. (At this point I feel I should remind you that Christianity is NOT a religion. Christianity is what God does, religion is what men do. Remember Adam, Eve, Nimrod and Babel?)

According to some surveys there are 22 major religions in the world today.

Here they are followed by an approximate number of adherents:

1. Christianity: 2 billion
2. Islam: 1.3 billion
3. Hinduism: 900 million
4. Secular/Nonreligious/Agnostic/Atheist: 850 million
5. Buddhism: 360 million
6. Chinese traditional religion: 225 million
7. Primal-indigenous: 150 million
8. African Traditional & Diasporic: 95 million
9. Sikhism: 23 million
10. Juche: 19 million
11. Spiritism: 14 million
12. Judaism: 14 million
13. Baha'i: 6 million
14. Jainism: 4 million
15. Shinto: 4 million
16. Cao Dai: 3 million
17. Tenrikyo: 2.4 million
18. Neo-Paganism: 1 million
19. Unitarian-Universalism: 800 thousand

20. Scientology: 750 thousand

21. Rastafarianism: 700 thousand

22. Zoroastrianism: 150 thousand

At first it may appear as if Christianity has strong numbers but we mustn't forget what constitutes a Christian. Without question it IS NOT religion. Sitting in a church on Sunday doesn't make you a Christian anymore than putting a wheelbarrow in the garage makes it a Harley Davidson. There's only one way to become a Christian and that's by accepting Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior. Our salvation is contingent on Christ's completed works not ours. Religion is the work of man, Christianity is the work of God.

As I researched these statistics I noticed two things worthy of consideration. Both lend themselves strongly to the world we live in. They are:

1. The numbers of those purporting to be Christians are decreasing.
2. The numbers of those swearing allegiance to Islam are increasing.

We are all well aware of the religiously fueled conflicts surrounding us. These have troubled the Middle East for years and problems have continued to escalate and not abate. The intensity of the hatred has continually aggrandized with each new generation. Moreover, many Christian church leaders continue to take sides and encourage their followers to support Israel. This, of course, is as political in nature as being conservative or liberal. As far as I know, the two cruelest things in the world are religion and politics. Seemingly the former directs and controls the latter which is why we should not promote either.

Religion is a work of the flesh and as such is an "outside deal." Christianity

is a work of the spirit and as such is an "inside deal." God has never looked on the outside and never will. He always looks on the inside.

I Samuel 16:7

But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for *the LORD seeth* not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.

So it is with Judaism and Israel. There is an "outside" and an "inside." One is a matter of works, the other a matter of faith.

Romans 2:28,29

For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither *is that* circumcision, which is outward in the flesh:

But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision *is that* of the heart, in the spirit, *and* not in the letter; whose praise *is* not of men, but of God.

Biblically, Israel is synonymous with circumcision. One may be put for the other as they can mean the same thing when the context is referring to; the Nation of Israel, their beliefs, practices or relationship to God. Circumcision was supposed to be an outward representation of an inward reality.

Romans 4:8-16

Blessed *is* the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.

Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision *only*, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness.

How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in *circumcision*, but in uncircumcision.

And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which *he had yet* being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also:

And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which *he had* being *yet* uncircumcised.

For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.

For if they which are of the law *be* heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect:

Because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, *there is* no transgression.

Therefore *it is* of faith, that *it might be* by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all,

Clearly, circumcision is of the flesh (outward) and faith is of the heart (inward).

Philippians 3:3

For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and

rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.

Hallelujah!!! Isn't that magnificent?

Obviously, we are what we are through no work of our own. It is only through the accomplishments of Jesus Christ and the love, mercy and grace of our God that we are what we are. Therefore, anything or anyone who has NOT accepted Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior cannot be joined to God.

Ephesians 2:14-18

For he is our peace, who hath made both [Jew and Gentile] one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition *between us*;

Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, *even* the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain [two, i.e. Jew and Gentile] one new man, *so* making peace;

And that he might reconcile both [Jew and Gentile] unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby:

And came and preached peace to you which were afar off [Gentile], and to them that were nigh [Jew].

For through him we both [Jew and Gentile] have access by one Spirit unto the Father.

Without Jesus Christ NOBODY has access, NOBODY! No Jew and no Gentile. With him there is no Jew nor Gentile, for he has made both one.

Galatians 3:28

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. There is no other way and no amount of

religion or pedigree will change this.

Acts 4:12

Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

I Corinthians 1:21-31

For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.

For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom:

But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness;

But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.

Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, *are called*:

But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty;

And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, *yea*, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are:

That no flesh should glory in his presence.

But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption:

That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.

Our Lord was not confused about who he was or what that meant regarding man's relationship to God.

John 14:6

Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.

Three times he used the definite article "the," indicating there was no other way, no other truth, no other life. He further punctuated these truths by . . . "no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." Could it be any plainer?

John 15:1-8

I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman.

Every *branch* in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.

Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.

I am the vine, ye *are* the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without [separate from, severed from] me ye can do nothing.

If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather *them*, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.

If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.

Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.

Without Christ we can do nothing. Separate from him we are separate from God. He alone is THE way, THE truth and THE life. He is the TRUE vine. All the others are counterfeits.

Glorify God by bearing much fruit, abide in Jesus Christ the true vine.
