

christian

WORKER



"We are workers together with Him..." (2 Cor. 6:1)

Volume 104, Number 12

8900 Manchaca Road, Austin, TX 78748

December 2018

THE SECT SPOKEN AGAINST

Johnny Ramsey

In Acts 28:22, we learn that followers of the Lord were looked upon as a sect and were persecuted because of their stand for truth. This one verse teaches us many lessons. It reminds us that Jesus prepared His servants for opposition and duress and the lack of popularity they would surely receive. In Luke 6:26 and John 16:2, the Savior said only false teachers would have universal acclaim and true servants would be killed. Paul was in jeopardy every hour (1 Cor. 15:30), and Peter was inspired to write of the persecution Christians can expect (1 Pet. 4:12-16). When Noah obeyed God, he condemned the world (Heb. 11:7); and the world did not like that! When we preach the high ideals of the Bible, the world of our day will not applaud either. However, we cannot lower the standard to please the worldly crowd (Gal. 1:10). Some brethren in our day are changing God's divine law of marriage and divorce to accommodate "the nations round about us." In doing such compromising teaching, they overlook repentance, purity and Jehovah's first divine institution of marriage and the home. One thing is for sure—if the first century church had blended in with the Roman empire, they would not have been "the sect every where spoken against."

Certainly, a church has to stand for something distinctively different from society to be spoken against. As Christ taught in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7), we will be opposed just like the prophets when we are courageous like Jeremiah, Amos and Elijah were! When our goal is fame, acceptability and numerical power, we tend to forget that spiritual greatness comes only one way—by doing God's will in God's way (2 John 1:9; Luke 6:46).

How can we follow the blessed Redeemer and be praised by sinful men, when He was crucified between thieves? In our incessant craving for approval by society, we tend to "go along to get along." Christianity was never based on such a premise. When truth on any subject embarrasses us, we need to get back to the basics of conversion. Let us search the scriptures (Acts 17:11), and not "the brotherhood," for our authority!

The church of our Lord is not a democracy where we vote on what we like. It is not a union meeting where carnal machinery decides policy. It is not a caucus arrangement where petition-signing overwhelms the scene. The church of our Lord is a divine monarchy

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Editor

Cody Westbrook



"We are workers together with Him..." (2 Cor. 6:1)

FAITH AND THE GOSPEL

Cody Westbrook

Justification is not a word that is used very often in day-to-day vernacular, but it is one with which we all should be familiar. Wayne Jackson defined the word as "the divine process by which God acquits the sinner and reckons him as righteous."¹ Thus, to be justified is to be "just-if-ied" never sinned. This is the theme of the apostle Paul's extraordinary letter to the Romans. The first chapter of Romans reveals the sins of the gentiles. They rejected God, so God rejected them (Rom. 1:18-32). But, they were not alone. In chapter two, Paul deals with the sins of the Jews. They stood in judgment of the gentiles, passing sentence upon them. But, in doing so they condemned themselves "for you who judge practice the same things" (Rom. 2:1). Thus, the sad conclusion of chapter three—"For all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). All people have the same problem—sin—and all people need the same solution—salvation. All are in need of justification. How then can such be attained? The answer is found in the purpose statement for the book, Romans 1:16-17.

The gospel is the good news of salvation through Jesus the Christ. Paul identifies that sublime message as the exclusive means of salvation for mankind. Why is that the case? Because within the gospel message is "the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith." That is to say that God's means of making men right with Him (righteous) is revealed in the gospel, the system of faith that produces faith in those who hear. Paul will comment on this further in Romans chapter 10. Verse 16 of this tenth chapter is one of the most tragic passages of scripture—"But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says,

1 Wayne Jackson, *Bible Words and Theological Terms Made Easy* (Stockton, CA: Courier Publications, 2002), 99.

Lord, who has believed our report?" That passage is followed by one of the most joyous verses of scripture—"So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). When we combine the thoughts of Romans 1:16-17 and Romans 10:17 what we learn is that the gospel is designed to produce faith, but not just any kind of faith, it produces a saving faith—an obedient faith.

Paul is clear in Romans 5:1 that justification is by faith. Romans 3:20-22 says that justification cannot come by simple law keeping but instead, "even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ..." What does this mean? Is he talking about the doctrine of salvation by faith in Jesus alone that is so prevalent in the religious world today, or is he talking about something else? The answer is found in Romans 4 in the example of Abraham. Scripture says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness" (Rom. 4:3). "Faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness" (Rom. 4:9) "and he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had... that he might be the father of all those who believe... (Rom. 4:11; c.f. Gal. 3:29). Abraham's faith contained three essential elements: acceptance, trust, and obedience.² In Genesis 12:1-5 God commanded Abraham to take his family and leave his homeland; to go to a land that God would show him. In so doing, God promised that He would bless him, and all the families of the earth through him. The fact that "Abram departed, as the Lord had spoken unto him" (Gen. 12:4) reveals three things. First, Abraham accepted that what God said was true. Second, he trusted God to fulfill His promises. Third, he obeyed the command of God. Had any one of these three elements been absent

2 Dan Winkler, *Just-if-ied Never Sinned: A Study of Romans* (Tuscaloosa, AL: Winkler Publications, 2005), 21-28

CHRISTIAN WORKER

(UPS 109-700)

Third-Class Postage Paid at Manchaca, Texas

Published on a Non-Profit basis by the

Southwest church of Christ, 8900 Manchaca Rd., Austin, TX 78748

E-mail: office@swcofc.org

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Editorial Address: 8900 Manchaca Rd., Austin, TX 78748

Single Subscriptions ----- \$6.00 per year

In Clubs of five or more ----- \$5.50 per year

Per family on the Congregation Plan ----- \$5.00 yearly

In a bundle to a congregation or individual ----- \$0.75 each

Foreign (Air Mail postage) ----- \$17.00 per year

FREE online subscription at www.swcofc.org

in Abraham, his faith would not have been acceptable.

His faith is further illustrated in Genesis 22 when God commanded him to offer Isaac upon the altar. The Hebrews writer said that Abraham did so “concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from which he also received him in a figurative sense” (Heb. 11:19). To illustrate the strength of Abraham’s faith in Jehovah consider this question: How many recorded resurrections do we have in Genesis before Genesis 22? James refers to this very account to illustrate the truth that “faith without works is dead” (Jas. 2:20).

Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which says, Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God (Jas. 2:21-23)

It is true that justification is by faith, but it is not just any kind of faith—it is an obedient faith. Abraham stands as a perfect example because he heard what God commanded and he obeyed. You and I must heed his example, for Romans 4:12 says that he is the father of circumcision to those “who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham.”

Like Abraham, you and I have the opportunity, yea responsibility, to listen to what God has to say. The difference is that God does not speak to us directly, as He did to Abraham. Instead, He speaks to us through His word, the gospel. That message is God’s power save because its proclamation is designed to produce obedient faith in those who hear. Like Abraham, we must accept that what God says is true, trust God to fulfill His promises, and obey His will.

Note also how Paul begins and ends this great letter. Romans 1:5 says “through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name.” The idea is that Paul received from the Lord the gracious gift of apostleship for the purpose of producing an obedient faith throughout the world. Romans 16:26 echoes the sentiment, stating the gospel is

now made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the

everlasting God, for obedience to the faith.

What was the purpose of Paul’s ministry? The production of obedient faith in people, through the proclamation of the gospel. Should that not be every Christian’s purpose? Romans 10:14 asks,

How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?

Our obligation is not only to come to an obedient faith ourselves, but also to spread the message of Christ throughout the world.

Are we fulfilling our obligation? On the congregational level, are we dedicated the time and energy to evangelizing the communities in which we live? On an individual level, are we studying God’s word, praying for opportunities to tell others about the gospel, and taking advantage of them when they appear? As we prepare to welcome in a new year, let us be mindful of the need every person has for salvation, and be determined to do whatever we can to see that it is met.

CW

THE CHURCH - THE LORD’S BRIDE

Bill Jackson

For all the expressions used concerning the church of the Lord—body, kingdom, etc.—those likening the church to the family or household of God have special significance to those who love the Bible. They understand family, and they then can readily see the church as the family, or household, of God (I Tim. 3: 15). God pursues the matter further in letting us see the relationship of Christ and the church as being that of husband and wife. Certainly, then, an intimacy bound in great love! Paul speaks to the point of the husband-wife relationship in Ephesians 5, and parallels his points with the Christ-church relationship. As to the marvel of it all, he states this: “This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church” (v. 32).

One of the Lord’s greatest parables was built on the fact that “the bridegroom cometh” (Matt. 25:6). He illustrated the inappropriateness of his

disciples fasting “while the bridegroom is with them” (Luke 5:34). To the Corinthians, Paul furthered the idea in stating his godly jealousy over them: “...for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ” (2 Cor. II: 2). The triumph of the saints, the church, at last is seen as being called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:9). Indeed, the church is the bride of Christ.

Let us now make some points as to the church as the Lord’s bride:

(1) She is bound to her husband. As the marriage bond is permanent (Rom. 7: 1,2), so we are added to the church by the Lord (Acts 2:47), and we are there to remain with the Lord until that time when the kingdom is delivered unto God the Father to be with him eternally (I Cor. 15:24).

(2) She is subject to her husband. “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord... the church is subject unto Christ...” (Eph. 5:22,24). Leadership and headship is given, in the family, to the husband. Headship in the church belongs to Christ (Col. I: 18), and the church is to be subject to his will. His will, after all, is the basis by which we one day will be judged (John 12:48).

(3) She is to be faithful to her husband. She knows, as he knows, that they are now made “one flesh” (Gen. 2:24) and neither of them may be lawfully joined to another. The relationship is one of faithfulness to each other. The Lord never defaults in this, and the church, the Lord’s body, must put forth the greatest effort always to abide in faithfulness to Christ, the head.

(4) She is to wear his name. Three times in the New Testament “Christian” is set forth as the proper name for the followers of the Lord (Acts II: 26; 26:28; 1 Pet. 4: 16). It is the name divinely given (Isa. 62:2). As in marriage, the wife takes the name of the husband, and if love is there, she proudly and faithfully takes that name and honors it. So we, in the church, are known as “Christians.” More, the designations set forth in the New Testament for the church are those honoring God and the Christ. “The churches of Christ salute you” (Rom. 16: 16). How pleased we should be, as the family of God, to be known by the name of him who died for us, and thus purchased us (Acts 20:28).

The church is the bride of Christ, and the relationship between Christ and the church is that of husband and bride, but of course is of deeper significance

because we are dealing with a relationship involving souls and eternity! The human marital relationship is, broken and ends when life ends here. The relationship of the Christ and the church lasts throughout this life, and then will last eternally!

CW

GIVING GOOD ADVICE

Ross Haffner

Those who are wise know that there are times when they need to advice of knowledgeable and mature Christians. “*A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels*” (Prov. 1:5). God says we need advice, not only as individuals, but for the good of the whole society because “*where no counsel is, the people fall*” (Prov. 11:14). However, we should not make the mistake in thinking that any advice will do. “*The counsels of the wicked are deceit*” and “*there are many devices in a man’s heart; nevertheless the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand*” (Prov. 12:5; 19:21). Sometimes I do not know what to say! I must conclude that if I am going to give good advice, it must be founded upon, and in harmony with, the word of God.

Give principled advice. Sometimes the answer is easy. Should I lie to try and serve some greater good? “*A righteous man hateth lying; but a wicked man is loathsome, and cometh to shame*” (Prov. 13:5). Other times we have to pull together principles and use illustrations to make the point like Jesus did. In Luke 10 when Jesus was asked “*what shall I do to inherit eternal life?*” and “*who is my neighbor?*” the Lord answered with questions, used the principles of scripture, offered a parable and then said “*go, and do thou likewise*” (Luke 10:25-37). If we can correctly apply the principles of scripture to life’s everyday situations we can give good advice.

Give cautious advice. When faced with a question the answer might seem clear at first. But until we hear both sides of the story we cannot truly help. Faulty assumptions will make a mess of things in a hurry. Peter found out if Sapphira was on the same page as her lying husband before she was condemned and punished (Acts 5:8). The Bible emphasizes

the need for witnesses (Matt. 18:16; 2 Cor. 13:1; 1 Tim. 5:19). If we are too hasty with our advice we could lead someone to the wrong answer, and that is unacceptable because souls are in the balance.

Give loving advice. When Paul talked about his ministry among the brethren in Thessalonica he described himself as a gentle mother, an affectionate servant, and a comforting father (1 Thess. 2:1-11). The loving thing for Paul to do was to be gentle, but hold nothing back. To comfort, but charge, and to work hard to help. Advice-givers should be willing to get their hands dirty when appropriate and serve. How do I know if my advice is as loving as it ought to be? Paul's work was done so that the brethren would "walk worthy of God" and the result was that they "received the word of God" and allowed it to work in them (1 Thess. 2:12-13). Will my advice lead them to further faithfulness or to self-service?

Ultimately our goal in giving advice is to help someone fulfill their purpose as a servant of God.

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man (Ecc. 12:13).

Godly advice might not be followed, but if it falls short of this aim, it is the wrong thing to say.

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“YE FATHERS”

Trent Kennedy

As a father, much of my time is spent considering parenting and meditating on being the best ‘dad’ I can be. As I sit at my desk and glance over my left shoulder I can see just how many books I have on the topic: *Common Sense Parenting*, *The Christian’s Home*, *The Battle for the Family*, *Bringing up Boys* (if God so blesses me), *God’s Design for the Home*, among others. However, as I look away from those books, I cannot help but see the Book of books sitting next to me. Nothing is more instructional or profound than the Bible when it comes to any topic, including parenting! Parents have the most important role to play in the care and concern of their children. In fact, if godly parents will treat their children as they ought, children will be much more likely to subject themselves to their parents in obedience and will certainly honor them all the way through life of this earth (Eph. 6:1-3) and are much more likely to live faithfully to death. A verse that reverberates in the mind of Christian dads is Ephesians 6:4, “*And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but nurture them in the chastening and admonition of the Lord.*” Although mothers and their roles in the family dynamic are specifically addressed in other passages (1 Tim. 5:10-14; Tit. 2:4), fathers are particularly spoken to in this text. A quick study of the Greek text shows that the word translated “fathers” is not a generic term for parents but a precise term for fathers. However, wives, as the God ordained helpers to the fathers in this text also must contribute to the monumental task of child rearing. The command to fathers is two-fold, first they are not to provoke children to wrath and second they are to bring those children up in the nurturing and admonition of God.

How do fathers not provoke their children to wrath? They must be willing to be an example to their children in everything from worship service to daily interactions. If children see their parents behaving poorly, they will follow suit. Fathers with short tempers and angry dispositions are pitiable examples to the children they are raising. Also, fathers need to treat their children with respect. They should not speak negatively of their children to others or put them down without careful consideration at any time. Fathers have the ultimate example in God Almighty. A study of the Old Testament should

produce an amazing respect for God's grace, mercy, kindness, love, provisions, and especially patience.

Simply bringing up a child in the Lord will not provoke them to wrath. Nurturing a child is required and includes protection, feeding, providing for, training, educating, to develop, and to cultivate a child. Certainly physical needs of children must be met, but this text stresses the need for spiritual cultivation of a child. Timothy serves as a good example (2 Tim. 1:5, 3:15). Children must also be admonished in the Lord. The American Heritage dictionary defines admonish with the following:

1. To reprove gently but earnestly.
2. To counsel (another) against something to be avoided; caution.
3. To remind of something forgotten or disregarded, as an obligation or a responsibility.

Admonishing is the idea of correction with the end purpose to make better or to make stronger. Certainly this is how Christians should feel about correcting their children. Some today would claim that it is inhumane to spank children, but the Bible disagrees.

Proverbs 13:24, "He that spareth his rod hateth his son; But he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes."

Proverbs 22:15, "Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child; But the rod of correction shall drive it far from him."

Proverbs 23:13-14, "Withhold not correction from the child; For if thou beat him with the rod, he will not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, And shalt deliver his soul from Sheol."

There is indeed a God given command to discipline children. This discipline should always be in love as God would discipline us (Heb. 12:6-13).

We have a loving example in the Father in heaven. Throughout the Bible God displays every attribute of a wonderful earthly father: love, mercy, grace, provision, patience, justice, and the like. We are servants of God. In all truth we are not even qualified enough to be servants, but he has gone beyond allowing us to be his servants. Through Jesus Christ we all have the ability to be sons of God.

For ye received not the spirit of bondage again unto fear; but ye received the spirit

of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified with him (Rom. 8:15-17).

Earthly fathers can see the ultimate example, the perfect Father by looking more closely at God!

CW

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"YOU'RE NOT ENTITLED TO MY APPROVAL"

Rick Brumback

Perhaps like you, I read editorial pieces in the newspaper and letters to the editor in which there are continual pleas for acceptance of a lifestyle, a viewpoint, or some course of action. The words "tolerant" and "tolerance," in their various forms, are usually included somehow. In thinking about such matters, it seems that a few points of observation and clarification are in order, both for myself, and for those who demand certain actions from me.

First, there are many things I tolerate but do not approve, if by tolerate we mean that I do not force someone to change their behavior. I recognize that there are those around us who live the “alternate lifestyle” of homosexuality. I do not believe that I am to use violence or force to compel them to desist. Jesus saw those about Him who did that which was wrong, and yet He did not attempt to compel them to change (cf. the rich, young ruler [Matt. 19:16-22]; those disciples who walked not after Him [John 6:65]; the Samaritans, whom James and John wanted to destroy [Luke 9:51-56]). John the Baptist lectured to those who came to hear him, and advised them to make correction in their lives (Luke 3:1-14). However, he did not use force to enact the change. So, while I realize that some abusive and criminal situations may demand intervention, and the government “*beareth not the sword in vain*” (Rom. 13:1-5), there are sinful behaviors in which people may engage, and I endure their presence to some degree.

Second, I can only approve that which Jehovah approves. As a Christian I recognize that He establishes what is right and wrong, while my responsibility is to uphold what He has declared. This divine right to legislate morality is reflected in the words of the prophet Isaiah,

Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! (5:20).

The principles of right and wrong do not change with the years, or with cultural mores. They are immutable, and my convictions in upholding them must be unmovable.

Finally, while I may tolerate (i.e., not remove by force) elements at odds with God’s will, I will speak out against them. In the imprecise speech of opinion, the concept of tolerance becomes abruptly and carelessly replaced by that of approval. Suddenly one is intolerant if they do not approve of what others are doing. As a Christian, this distinction is significant for me and my conduct. While I have no right to take the law into my own hands, neither do I have the right to call “*evil good, and good evil.*” Nor would I want to. Thus, those who violate Jehovah’s laws are not entitled to and will not receive my approval for their actions. My highest obligation is not to society, my country, or my fellow man. It is to my God. I will give my support to that which He champions, and that may mean withholding approval from my fellow humans. I am content with that course.

My approval is a precious possession. I will extend it only when I can do so with the approval of Jehovah. I may tolerate the presence of evil, but I will not sanction it. I cannot. My Lord died to remove evil (1 John 3:8), and I will do everything I can to continue His cause.

CW

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where the King has all authority (Matt. 28:18). Educational institutions and doctoral degrees do not dominate the gospel system, and large congregations in metropolitan areas are not more important than small ones in the country. All men stand on level ground at the foot of the cross (1 Cor. 2:1-5), and each alike is answerable to the Savior’s directives (John 12:48). One thing is guaranteed for sure: follow the Man of Galilee and you will be spoken against! We cannot follow multitudes (Ex. 23:2), but we must be like the apostles who became the garbage of the world (1 Cor. 4:9).

We even have brethren today who send their “church staff” (whatever that is) to large denominations to find out their success secrets. Why not arrange a session with the devil or the Mafia, since there are so many devotees on their side? The seed of the kingdom is the word of God (Luke 8:11). That is where we ought to be looking.

Truth will always be controversial, and it will always be in the minority (Matt. 7:13-14). However, it will always be distinctive, too (1 Pet. 2:9-12). Christianity has never been a game for sissies, and the faint-hearted usually quit or compromise or join the enemy. Satan and his servants will always speak against the pure gospel way, so we must “*be set for the defense of the gospel*” (Phil. 1:17) and “*contend earnestly for the faith*” (Jude 3). Sadly, we must even be ready to stand against brethren who apostatize (Rom. 16:17). Our failure to openly stand up for God and the Bible (Acts 17:3) will result in a church so weak that no one will speak against us. I am afraid that is exactly what some brethren want.

CW



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