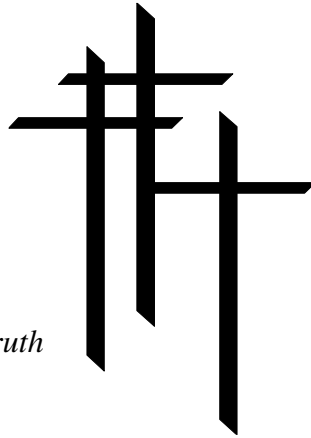


Timely Messenger



*Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth
Speaking the Truth in Love*

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THE CHURCH AND THE BLESSED HOPE

By John LaVier

One great reason for the religious confusion existing today is the failure to ascertain just what God's program is in this dispensation of grace. During the present age God is doing **one** thing, and **one** thing only. He is bringing into existence, and bringing to completion, the Church which is the Body of Christ. Needless to say, this is not a denominational church, in spite of what many zealous denominationalists may think. God says, "There is ONE body" (Eph. 4:4). Truly it

has been the devil's trick to divide and subdivide the members of the ONE body into innumerable sects and religious groups, thus causing them to lose their testimony and discrediting them with the world.

The one true Bible Church is not an earthly organization, but a divine organism. It is the Body of Christ, and it is composed of every blood-washed, redeemed child of God. Every sinner saved by grace is a member of that body, and some day the last member will be added to

the body, and then the body complete will be caught up to meet the Head in glory. We call this "the Rapture" of the church, and just when this wondrous event will take place can not be known.

The church was a mystery, not made known unto the sons or men in other ages. It was hid in the mind and heart of God from a bygone eternity. The prophets knew nothing about this church age, and the Lord did not choose to reveal it while He was here upon the earth. But after His death and resurrection, and His rejection by the nation Israel, He made known His secret purpose in this age through the Apostle Paul.

The present dispensation of the mystery is a signless, timeless, unprophesied period of time. The Rapture, which was also a secret, will end this age of grace. "Behold, I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed" (1 Cor. 15:51). "For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout ... and the dead in Christ shall rise

first; then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord” (1 Thess. 4:16, 17).

The coming of the Lord for the members of the Body is to be distinguished from His “Second Coming,” when He comes to bring in the kingdom. The latter coming is the subject of much prophecy; the former of none. When Christ comes for the church, He only comes into midair and the saints are caught up to meet Him. When He comes “in like manner” as He went, He returns to earth and “His feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives.” His coming for the church will be a secret coming, unperceived by the world. When He comes to reign, “every eye shall see Him.” His coming for the church precedes the Great Tribulation period. His coming in power and great glory occurs at the close of the Great Tribulation.

When the Lord raptures His church home to glory, there will undoubtedly be many separations. Every

saved one will be caught away by the Lord, and every unsaved one, whether father, mother, brother, sister, wife, husband, or child, will be left behind. However we must not confuse this separation with that one spoken of by the Lord in Matthew 24:40, 41. In the so-called Olivet discourse of Mathew 24 and 25, neither the church nor the Rapture of the church are at all in view. Christ was not referring to the Rapture when He said, “Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left.”

In the above words spoken by the Savior, the one taken is taken away in judgment, and the one is left to enter the glorious millennial reign of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the secret revealed through Paul, the one taken is not taken in judgment, but is caught away by the Lord into eternal blessedness to be forever with Him in glory, while the other one is left behind to endure the terrors

of the Great Tribulation, “because they received not the love of the truth that they might be saved” (2 Thess. 2:10).

In closing may we ask if you are prepared for this wondrous event, the catching away of the Body of Christ? Are you a member of that Body? It is not sufficient to have your name on some church roll down here, but is your name written in heaven? If not, just now look by faith to Calvary, believe the gospel that Christ died for your sins, receive Him as your Savior, and God will save you by His grace. Then you too will be “Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ” (Tit. 2:13).

*For the hope which
is laid up for you in
heaven, whereof ye
heard before in the
word of the truth of
the gospel.*

—Colossians 1:5

“FORGETTING THOSE THINGS ...”

By Robert E. Hanna

So many things I recollect
(When deep in pensive retrospect)
That give me reason for regret,
And which I've striven to forget.

For such are memories of days
Before I entered into ways
Of service for my Lord and King,
The gospel of His peace to bring.

Yet through remembering I find
Great consolation comes to mind
As I reflect upon the grace
That brought His light to
this dark place.

Nostalgia I'll not entertain,
Nor old regrets to cause me pain;
Instead I'll joy forevermore,
That these can't pass through
heaven's door.

TIMELY MESSENGER

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THE MESSAGE OF THE CROSS — PART 3

By Gregg Bing

Continued from last month.

“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” (1 Cor. 1:18)



Christ's death on the cross is the greatest event in human history. By sending His Son into the world to die on Calvary for our sins, God made it possible for sinful men to be reconciled to Him through faith in the simple message of "Christ and Him crucified." Jesus' death opened

the way for all men to be saved from their sins and receive the gift of eternal life (Rom. 6:23). Why, then, do so many people refuse to receive this wonderful gift? We find the answer to this question by examining the third aspect of the message of the cross:

THE PRODUCT OF THE CROSS

The night Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the heavenly hosts praised His coming as a time of "peace on earth, goodwill toward men" (Luke 2:13-14), but Jesus later declared His coming would result in very different conditions.

“Do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather division. For from now on five in one house will be divided: three against two, and two against three. Father will be

divided against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.” (Luke 12:51-53)

What would divide people, even families, in this way? The cross of Christ! The cross has split the world in two: those who believe in Christ and Him crucified are saved, while those who reject Christ are perishing (1 Cor. 1:18).

The problem is not people's sins; Jesus settled that matter on Calvary where He died for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2). The issue that divides people is their response to the message of the cross.

Those who believe in Christ and Him crucified are saved from sin's judgment and brought into a relationship with God. Those who reject Christ and His cross remain in their sins, separated from God. The question which puzzles believers is, why

so many people reject the Lord Jesus Christ and the wonderful gift of eternal life He provided at Calvary.

Paul identifies two classes of men who reject the message of the cross.

“For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness.” (1 Cor. 1:22)

Greeks — Seek After Wisdom

The Greeks were lovers of wisdom, not the wisdom of God but the wisdom of man. With their emphasis on wisdom, the Greeks produced what the world still considers some of the greatest philosophers, scientists, mathematicians, politicians, historians, etc. who ever lived. Yet, their pursuit of such human wisdom led them away from the one true God. This has always been the case. In his letter to the Romans, Paul described how the Gentile nations, prior to the time of

Abraham, followed this same path.

“Although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. ... who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.” (Rom. 1:21-25)

Just as Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1:21, “The world through wisdom did not know God.” It was true then; it is still true today.

The same types of people exist today: scientists, philosophers, educators, politicians, artists, businessmen, etc.; so-called intellectuals who glorify education, knowledge, and

worldly wisdom above all else, particularly above the knowledge and wisdom of God (2 Cor. 10:5). Their philosophy is called humanism, a belief in the basic goodness of human beings and their inborn ability to pursue truth and morality through rational thought, without the need for God.

Those who subscribe to this philosophy consider the message of the cross to be foolishness; it goes against everything they believe. The cross forces them to acknowledge that they are not basically good, but sinful and evil; that they are powerless to change their lives for the better; and that they must trust in God and the sacrificial death of His Son to find true meaning in their lives.

While it may appear foolish to the world, it pleased God “through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe” (1 Cor. 1:21). God has declared in His Word:

“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the un-

derstanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?" (1 Cor. 1:19-20)

Paul warned the Colossians not to get carried away by such empty and deceitful philosophies and traditions, ideas that spring from the imaginations of sinful men and are not "according to Christ" (Col. 2:8).

Jews — Request a Sign

The Jews needed to see outward signs; they demanded proof before they would believe. The Jewish religious leaders told Jesus, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You" (Matt. 12:38). The word "want" is the Greek word for "will" and implies they had determined they must have a sign before they would believe Him.

Jesus had already performed a number of amazing miracles: healing the lame, giving sight to the

blind, cleansing the lepers, casting out demons, etc. Yet, "although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him" (John 12:37). So, when they demanded a sign from Jesus, He answered them:

"An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here." (Matt. 12:39-41)

Even after Jesus arose after three days and nights in the grave, the Jews still did not believe in Him (Luke 16:31). Why not? Why did they reject "Christ and Him crucified?"

Israel's problem was the attitude they had developed regarding the Mosaic law. God placed Israel under the law after their exodus from Egypt. The law governed every aspect of their life: morally, socially, and religiously. By the time Jesus came, the Jews' religion had been in place for about 1500 years. Over these years, the meaning and purpose of the law was gradually corrupted. The people became more concerned with their religious traditions (interpretations of the law) than with the commandments of God (Matt. 15:1-9). The service of the priests, the offerings, and the feasts became little more than meaningless rituals. The hearts of the people moved farther and farther from the Lord.

The Jews, who were God's chosen people, became filled with pride because of their unique relationship with God. They began to look at the works of the law (or their traditions) as a means of establishing their own righteousness. Paul ac-

knowledge Israel had a zeal for God, but it was not according to the knowledge found in God's Word.

“Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, The man who does those things shall live by them.” (Rom. 10:1-5)

The message of the cross was a stumbling block to the Jews; it offended them. Yes, they were looking for a Messiah to come and save them, but not from their sins. They were looking for a Messiah to deliver them from their enemies, the Romans. The

Messiah they envisioned would be a powerful political leader. Jesus was not what they were expecting at all: born to a poor family, raised in the small village of Nazareth, meek and humble in manner, teaching things most people did not understand, challenging the authority of the Jewish leaders, and indicting them as sinners. This was not their idea of a Savior.

Today, many people are much like the Jews of Jesus' day. They too are religious, and while they may not practice Judaism, they still focus on the outward show, the religious ritual. Paul described them as “having a form of godliness, but denying its power,” and he warned us, “from such turn away” (2 Tim. 3:5). The power they deny is the power of the cross, the power of the message of “Christ and Him crucified.” Their religion is that of legalism, a belief in man's ability to save himself through religious works: going through rituals, submitting to ordinances, memorizing creeds, keeping the law, joining a church, etc., in order to

make themselves righteous.

To those who depend on their religion, with its system of works, the message of the cross is a stumbling block. They are offended at the idea that they have nothing to offer to God, and that their works are powerless to save them. Like Cain, who offered the works of his own hands to try and please God, the legalist rejects the notion that Christ's death and resurrection is not only necessary, but also sufficient to bring us to God. The One who died to be their Savior becomes, to them, “a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense.” They stumble and are offended because they are “disobedient to the Word” (1 Pet. 2:7-8). God's Word says:

“... a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we (Jews) have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.” (Gal. 2:16)

Conclusion

What about you? How do you respond to the message of the cross? Are you, like the Greeks, seeking to find fulfillment in life through the wisdom of this world? Or, are you, like the Jews, depending on your religion and your good works to attain a righteous standing with God? While the majority of the people in the world rely on their own wisdom or their own works to give meaning to their lives,

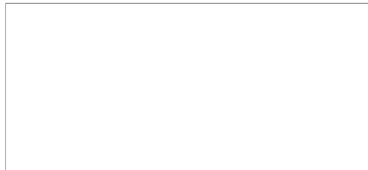
“It pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For Jews request a sign,

and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” (1 Cor. 1:21-24)

True wisdom for salvation is not found in human reasoning, but in the message of “Christ and Him crucified.” True power to save from sins is not found in human religious works, but in the message of “Christ and Him crucified.” This is the wonderful message of the cross.

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”

(John 3:16-18)



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