



The Idols we worship in Christianity

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A parable-style Discussion of deeply embedded Idols in Christianity: 1. Introduction. 2. Sugar! (Our insatiable appetite for non-nutritious junk food in church). 3. The Bible. (Is it by any means possible that the Bible could be the church's Idol?). 4. Systems. (Church people generally have much more faith in systems than in God).

Introduction

The prophetic word is a curious thing:

If properly mandated by God,
it strikes fear in the hearts of the worldly minded,
delights the hearts of the godly
and brutally consumes all unrighteousness which might dare to stand in its way.
To the one it constitutes the fumes of death; to the other, the fragrances of life.
It embarrasses the wicked and elates the prayerful.
It exposes carefully obscured lies and confronts hidden sin.
It is bold and explicit.
To the proud it is gall and wormwood; to the humble it is honey and dew.
The prophetic word is like a lion: You needn't feed it - it feeds itself.
For a word to take effect it needn't be motivated; it needn't be defended.
It may be attacked, but cannot be defeated.
It may be denied, but never diminished.
It may be criticized, but never scathed.

Once the prophetic word leaves the lips of the prophet,
or once the ink of the full stop dries on his writing pad, nothing can stop it.
It dashes through the cosmos in multi-dimensional waveform
at the helter-skelter speed of white light,
prying out its every target - be it natural or spiritual.
Nothing can run from it, nothing can hide from it, nothing can overtake it.
It destroys by fire the carefully constructed strongholds of the deceiver,
whilst it hones the eternal purposes of God.
Demons tremble; angels rejoice.

Is not my word like fire," declares the LORD, "and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?"
- Jer. 23:29

It infuses the discouraged;
it strengthens the weak;
it rips off blindfolds;
it breaks chains of captivity and smashes prison doors of iron and steel.

It lights up the darkness and brings hope to the downtrodden.
It brings the purposes of God to manifestation
and calls the things that are not as though they were.
It creates new things and nourishes the old:

*As the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish,
so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater,
so is my word that goes out from my mouth:
It will not return to me empty,
but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.
You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace;
the mountains and hills will burst into song before you,
and all the trees of the field will clap their hands.*

- Is. 55:10 - 12.

Having been in a prophetic ministry for many years, for the sake of survival I simply had to apply myself to the discernment of prophetic words. Usually, ninety percent and more would simply pass you by. But some strike like a sledgehammer. They hit you right between the eyes - in your "knower". At first they violently upset you, and clash with your frame of reference with metal-wrenching brutality. They eliminate and destroy the hearer's own ideas and arguments with surgical precision. They soften mental concrete blocks and rearrange them into God's order. They bring healing and wellness.

I marvel at watching these words accomplish what God desires. I have developed a healthy awe for true prophetic words, and usually try to stay out of their way. Through the years, I've witnessed several ministries perish for lack of awe of prophetic words. Similar to the dread that the death of Ananias and Sapphira at God's hand had struck, the perishing of these ministries has filled me with even greater awe than before.

I did get the message loudly and clearly: Don't mess with God. Don't do it YOUR way. Work WITH Jesus as a co-worker in the fields - not AGAINST Him! Align yourself and your ministry with HIS order - not your own, or the world's, or even the church's. He is God. Do as HE says.

In the following chapters I've attempted to make a compilation of words that I've received during the past years - which one could lump together under the heading "The Idols that we worship in Christianity". Most have come via others, and some directly to myself. Some came in the form of words, some were visions, some were dreams and most have been simple revelation.

I don't intend to relay them to you verbatim or literally. That would simply take up too much space and require too much explanation and interpretation. Rather, I'd attempt to relay them in parable style. This, of course, would "contaminate" them with my own humanity - which is a glaring reality. But in my simple humanity I don't know any other way to relay them to you. So please bear with me.

A couple of years ago I've done something similar on this forum (to church structures). What was said had shocked and upset some hearers to the degree that they had labeled this ministry to be "politically incorrect". But God isn't mocked. Most of those, if they were to be honest, have to admit today that time and reality have proved those words to be true and accurate. The unthinkable and impermissible of those times have become commonplace and widely accepted today.

When all is said and done, God's intervention remains the true vindication of any prophetic word. It originates with Him, is mandated by Him and vindicated by Him. Vindication is by manifestation, and manifestation does not allow for much protest. That's red face stuff!

Similarly, non-vindication and non-manifestation also allows for a red face - that of the prophet! And only time will tell the difference.

Jeremiah beautifully and soulfully expresses the prophet's dilemma:

*Whenever I speak, I cry out proclaiming violence and destruction.
So the word of the LORD has brought me insult and reproach all day long.
But if I say,
"I will not mention him or speak any more in his name,"
his word is in my heart like a fire,
a fire shut up in my bones.
I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot.
- Jer. 20:8 – 9.*

Over the years the Lord has granted me the privilege of experiencing a fraction of what Jeremiah is saying:

Personally, the Lord has never granted me pleasant, soothing words to tickle people's ears with. And, as with Jeremiah, it has brought me much insult and reproach. But, whenever I would decide "this is enough!", His word inside me would flare up like a fire blown by the wind - overpowering me. Over time I have learnt that I cannot fight against it - I am simply too feeble. I have to speak it out. And face the music afterwards. More often than not it makes me look like, and feel like a clumsy, indiscriminate fool. Hence, God's vindication does not result in triumphalism. It much rather evokes a deep sense of relief!

If you can by experience relate to what I've just said, you will most probably read the chapters to follow with much joy and inner witness. If not, those chapters might perhaps offend you deeply, since we will address idols that are so deeply embedded in Christianity that we have come to love them dearly. Over many centuries they have been ingrained into the Christian psyche. So deeply that they have resulted in strongholds of the mind - the mind of collective Christianity.

The first one we'll be looking at is the issue of "Sugar!".

Sugar!

Once upon a time, long, long ago, there was a king in a country far, far away.

It was a beautiful country, and the king was a good king. He loved his people and ruled fairly for many years. The citizens of the country were happy and loved their king.

The king appointed governors in every province - who acted wisely on his behalf. The king also appointed spokesmen in each province who would speak to his people in his name. He built schools and put able teachers in them to teach his people. In every town he appointed a mayor to look after the interests of the town and its people. He also appointed ambassadors who would travel to faraway countries. They were to tell the peoples of the earth about his beautiful kingdom.

Then came a famine. The sun was hot, the rain stayed away and the earth became dry and arid. The people suffered. They had no food or water.

So the king decided to open his storehouses. In these storehouses he had plenty of healthy food and water that he had wisely stored up over many years. In his storehouses he also had a new, unknown food. He had secretly imported this from a faraway country to treat his people. The name of this food was: Sugar!

The king told his spokesmen in the provinces to speak to the mayors of each town: "Tell them to go to my storehouses and get food for my people for as long as the famine would last!"

When the people heard this, they rejoiced and were happy again. Every day the mayors brought them food and water from the storehouses. Everybody had enough good food to eat and water to drink.

And for the first time they also tasted sugar! They sprinkled it over their food in the mornings, the afternoons and the evenings. They put it in their coffee and tea. The mayors saw that the people loved sugar, and thought up recipes to bake cookies and make candy. Everybody ate and had their fill of the sweet stuff. And they were happy.

Then the rains came again. The soil became moist and crops sprouted from the earth.

The king closed his storehouses and told his people to grow their own food as before. But now the people were unhappy. "Where is the sugar?" they asked. "We want sugar!" So the mayors of the towns called a meeting. They decided to import their own sugar. They set up shops from where they sold sugar to the people. Now the people were happy again. Again they sprinkled sugar over their food in the mornings, the afternoons and evenings. They put it in their coffee and tea. They baked cookies and made candy. They even put sugar in their water! The mayors sold much sugar and became rich. They saw that the people always came back for more sugar. They told the teachers in the schools: "Teach the kids to eat lots of sugar!" They sent messages to the ambassadors in the faraway countries to tell the peoples of the earth about their good king and his country of sugar.

The king was very sad about all this sugar business. He watched as the mayors got richer and greedier. He watched as his people grew lazier and fatter. They didn't eat healthy food anymore. They ate spoonfuls of sugar in the mornings, the afternoons and the evenings. They drank sweet coffee and tea. They ate cookies and candy. And they drank fizzy, sweet water! The teachers taught the kids in school to eat more sugar. The mothers gave their babies sweet water instead of milk. Everybody's teeth rotted away and their breath went foul! They were lazy and fat. Many became ill, suffered much and died. The ambassadors heard of this and were ashamed. They loved their good king, but his kingdom wasn't good anymore. They were not sure what to tell the nations of the earth about their king's kingdom anymore.

So the king sent his spokesmen to his people. "The king says you should eat healthy food again!" they told the people. They showed the people the wheat, grain, vegetables, fruit and meat they used to eat before.

But the people became angry. "We don't want that!" they shouted. "It is hard to grow crops and food! We cannot chew vegetables and fruit since our teeth have rotten away! We want sugar!" And they drove the spokesmen from their towns. They even killed a few.

The mayors were happy. "If ever these spokesmen would show up again, we must kill them all" they told the people. "We will" said the teachers and the parents. And the mayors were happy that the people would always return to them for sugar.

When the king heard this, he became very angry. He called a meeting of his governors and told them: "I know where the root of this problem lies. Sugar is good when one eats little of it. It gives people energy to do things for my kingdom. But my people have now grown used to eating too much of it. They are so lazy and fat that they cannot grow crops anymore. And from childhood they get taught to eat only sugar. They have no appetite for good food anymore, and their teeth have rotten away! Hence, they become ill, suffer much and die."

"My mayors who are supposed to look after them are exploiting them. My mayors become more powerful and greedy every day. And they supply my addicted people with this excess. They have even killed my spokesmen whom I have sent to save them from their folly."

"So, my dear governors, this is what I am going to do ..."

...

And they lived happily ever after.

The End.

Dear reader, what do you think did the king do?

What would YOU have done if you were to be the king?

This is a rather serious question, since the parable above tells the story of today's church. The regular church member has been raised on spiritual sugar.

And as long as its sweetness will keep them coming back, church leaders (the mayors) will carry on feeding their members spiritual sugar.

But sugar has absolutely no nutritional value. It cannot build strong bones and teeth, strong muscles or strong immunity systems. To build that, one needs to eat fruit, vegetables and meat. Sugar does not cultivate any healthy appetite for such foodstuffs. And when a life-long diet of sugar has eaten away one's teeth, one simply CANNOT chew these - even if you wanted to! The result is a spiritually fat, unhealthy, lethargic, lazy church that has no desire to find or cultivate its own spiritual food, but wants to be spoon-fed sweet things week by week.

I hope you've recognized the five-fold ministry in the parable above. Before you take a glance at the legend at the end of this session, please re-read the story above, and see whether you could recognize Jesus, apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers in the story.

The Scriptures do not mention sugar as the Christian's primitive foodstuff. It speaks of milk - an infinitely more nutritional foodstuff than sugar:

*Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk,
so that by it you may grow up in your salvation,
now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.*

- 1 Pet. 2:2 - 3.

We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn.

*In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers,
you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again.*

You need milk, not solid food!

*Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant,
is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness.*

*But solid food is for the mature,
who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.*

*Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity,
not laying again the foundation of*

repentance from acts that lead to death,

and of faith in God,

instruction about baptisms,

the laying on of hands,

the resurrection of the dead,

and eternal judgment.

And God permitting, we will do so.

- Heb. 5:11 - 6:3.

Milk is for babies. Spiritual milk is for spiritual babies - teachings about repentance, faith, baptism, laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment.

Why do these authors call those teachings spiritual "milk"?

Simply because these topics deal with the spiritual birth of a new believer:

In order to be considered properly born, a new believer needs to repent of his sin, to have faith, to be baptized and to receive the laying on of hands to receive the Holy Spirit. These are the very first things a new believer needs to know and experience.

The next he needs to know is what he'd signed up for: Resurrection from the dead - in stead of eternal judgment.

And voilà! - there's your newly weaned convert!

I'm afraid few church members today have even received any spiritual milk. Most have only had sugar. How do we know that?

Well, simply ask any regular church member to explain repentance, faith, baptism and the laying on of hands to you - and you'll have a rather embarrassed, disarranged Christian in front of you. Mention the resurrection from the dead and eternal judgment and you might be accused of fundamentalism! And that's just the MILK! We haven't even started to speak about solid food!

What do regular church members desire to hear in church?

Well ... about God's love for us.

About God's forgiveness, gentleness and patience.

About the humble Jesus who died for us.

How He heals the sick.

How He picks up the downtrodden.

About the Holy Spirit our comforter.

How He touches us in worship.

About His beauty.

About His good thoughts for me.

About love in the family.

About reconciliation.

About how people got saved.

About how we need to look after animals and the environment.

After a hard week at work where I had to face the world to further my own interests, I want to be soothed and nursed on Sunday by God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

I want to hear that I'm still all right.

And that Jesus loves me.

And serves me ...

*For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine.
Instead, to suit their own desires,
they will gather around them a great number of teachers
to say what their itching ears want to hear.
- 2 Tim. 4:3.*

The things above are good things. They are true. They supply us with energy to do the work of the Kingdom. They are precious Christian assets.

But if that's ALL we hear and want to hear, they turn into sugar. They will make us ill and cause our spiritual death. They will cause us to lose our appetite for solid food and meat.

What is it that church members DON'T want to hear, and what is subsequently hardly ever preached about, and much less practiced?

Well ... about repentance and dying to self.

About taking up one's cross and marching in public like a fool who's been tried and convicted.

About personal sacrifice and paying the price of the Kingdom.

About blood, sweat and tears.

About personal humiliation.

About physical, emotional or spiritual suffering.

About taking inspired physical, financial and relational risks for the sake of the Kingdom.

About personal integrity, fear of God and obedience until death.

About taking up the sword of the Spirit and driving back the darkness.

About raising the dead and driving out demons.

About standing up for truth and rejecting lies.

About losing money, relationships and favour with men for the sake of favour with God.

About fervent prayer and soul-wrenching intercession.

About us serving Him ...

This is solid food.

Even the few who ever hear this, hardly ever practice it.

The sugar addicts in the parable above would probably have called any citizen who would practice a normal, healthy diet by derogatory names, such as “health fanatic”, “veggie” or “fruitcake”. Similarly, sugar addicted Christians have invented derogatory names for those with a normal Christian diet: “Fundamentalists”, “zealots”, “radicals” and “so heavenly minded they are of no earthly good”.

Somehow we’ll have to get the fruit and vegetable gardens of Christianity growing again. Somehow we’ll have to cultivate an appetite for tomatoes and berries, pumpkin, peas, broccoli and spinach. Somehow we’ll need to lose our fear of blood - and kill a sheep and slaughter a bull and eat its meat. Somehow we’ll have to obtain the grace to chew them with our rotten teeth, to swallow and to keep them down! Somehow we’ll have to grow up!

Why?

Because the King is in a meeting with his governors. He is about to say what He is going to do about the sugar business. And when the King’s spokesmen haven’t been heeded - and killed - He shows up Himself. Then it is time for judgment.

Shall we repent of our Sugar Idol now?

[Legend: The King = Jesus. Governors = Apostles. Spokesmen = Prophets. Ambassadors = Evangelists/missionaries. Mayors = Pastors. Teachers = Teachers. See Eph. 4:11]

The Bible

A man had visited his doctor for a general examination.

“What’s the verdict, doc?” he asked as he put on his shirt and shoes again.

“Have a seat, Conrad”, the doctor replied solemnly. “Things don’t look too well.”

Con sat down, facing the doctor.

“You’ll have to consult my son about this one. He has years of experience in the field of your illness. Else you will die, Conrad.”

“Do you have his phone number for me, doc?”

“Well, yes, but I never give it to my patients. I prefer that they go look for him.”

“Are you serious?” Con couldn’t believe his ears.

“Yes, Conrad. Good day, Conrad.”

All at once, Con found himself in the parking lot outside Dr. Good’s practice. The parking lot was deserted and empty, with only his own solitary car parked where he had left it on the tarmac. A rather dirty-looking little boy was playing with his toy cars in the sand to the edge of the tarmac.

Con walked over.

“Do you know Dr. Good?” Con pointed towards the medical practice.

The boy continued playing without looking up.

“What do you want?” the boy asked, still pushing his toy car in the sand.

“Do you know Dr. Good or know where his son’s medical practice is?”

“Oh, yes!” The boy looked up. “It’s easy. You just start over there.” The boy had his soiled forefinger pointed at what looked like a circular plastic hoop suspended vertically between two wooden poles - about 100 yards away.

“What a freaky business!” Con muttered to himself as he set off towards the hoop.

Arriving there, a sun-faded perspex sign on one pole said: “Jump through the hoop.”

“Wow!” Con muttered to himself. “This really freaks me out. I don’t have time for kiddie games!”

So he quickly jumped through the hoop- which wasn’t too high off the ground. His body ached as he did so.

As he glanced back at the hoop, he noticed another perspex sign on the other side of one pole. It said: “Dr. Good jr.” with an arrow indicating the direction to go. Looking in that direction Con saw a similar hoop about 200 yards away.

Arriving at the second hoop, he saw two men, one with a huge beard, sitting in camping chairs in front of a nearby canvas tent. They were cooking something in a black pot over an open fire.

"Welcome at our hoop!" said the bearded man as he stood up and stretched out his hand. "The name is Rooter - H. Rooter. I will teach you about this hoop."

"Yes, welcome, said the second man as he shook Con's hand. The surname is Ventist - S.D.A. Ventist. This is the most important hoop of them all."

Con immediately noticed that this second hoop was fixed a little higher above the ground than the previous one. Once again, a faded perspex sign said: "Jump through the hoop."

"Have you been to dr. Good jr?" Con asked.

"Yes, we've been there," Rooter replied. "We know how to get there. But we couldn't wait for him to get us well, since we just had to return to this hoop. We love it! It's such an important stage of getting to dr. Good jr. So we set up camp here."

Con positioned himself for a run-up to jump through the hoop. "What strange people!" he thought.

"No, no! Stop!" cried the bearded man. "You have it all wrong. You cannot jump this hoop today. Tomorrow is Saturday - then you can jump!"

Con stopped in his tracks. "Tomorrow? Why tomorrow?"

"One may only jump through this hoop once every week - on a Saturday.

"I cannot wait that long" said Con as he again positioned himself for his run-up.

"Wait!" said Ventist. "You only need to wait until dusk tonight - then it would be OK!"

"What nonsense!" Con thought. He started his run-up and jumped through the hoop. Once again, his body ached as he went through.

The two campers freaked out: "Now you will NEVER find Dr. Good jr! Anathema!" they cried. "Alas! Alas! You should have listened to us! We know how to do this!"

Con ignored them, took a glance at the second perspex sign to get his next clue, and started off in that direction.

He could not see the third hoop, but kept on walking. After a while, it came into view.

As he drew closer, he saw several families camping next to the hoop.

A thin, sad-looking man wearing a dirty beret slowly rose from his camping chair.

"I suppose you're looking for Dr. Bonne?" he said in a thick French accent as he stretched out his hand.

"He's an excellent doctor!"

Con frowned as he shook the sad man's hand. "Dr. Bonne? Well, no. I'm actually looking for a Dr. Good jr."

"Yeah, yeah," the sad man replied. "That's what all the ignorant people call him. He's actually French-speaking and from French decent. "Bonne" in French is "Good" in English. And you better get it right. Bonne, Bon, Bonn, Boun, Bhon, Bonne, whatever - as long as it sounds French. He loves his French name. French is a much superior language to English."

"What a snob!", Con thought to himself.

"But Dr. Good's dad spoke perfect English to me just a while ago - without any accent!"

"You'd better stop using that name", the thin man replied. "You won't get anywhere using that name! That's not Dr. Good you're looking for - he's English. It's Dr. Bonne - the French one - you're looking for. It's from using the wrong name that my wife's so ill."

He gestured in the direction of his tent as the sad look on his face intensified.

"I suppose you also believe the curtain story" he continued.

"Curtain story?" Con was perplexed.

"Yeah, everybody arriving here talks about the stupid curtain. Nobody wants to jump the hoops anymore. They simply don't realize how important the hoops are. Look there!"

His outstretched arm swept across the many pitched tents.

"Can all these people be wrong, hé? We ALL know exactly where to find Dr. Bonne. We are all here for his celebration, and counting the days. We hope he will come in person, too.

"But why don't you just take your wife to dr. Bonne?", Con asked. "I'm sure he'd be able to cure her!"

The thin man is instantly overcome with emotion. Fighting against his tears, he stutters: "She's too weak to jump the hoops anymore. And she still calls him 'Dr. Good'. And we have to wait for the celebration. He might show up."

With that, he burst into tears, sobbing.

Con handed the sad man his handkerchief. "Are you sure he'd show up?"

"He's never shown up before, but we always hope he would." The sad man wiped his eyes and nose.

"She could come with me," Con offered. "I'll take her."

The sad man's eyes lit up.

"Really?" He paused and thought for a moment. "Are you going to do the hoops or the curtain? I don't want her to do that stupid curtain thing."

"What's this curtain thing about?" Con frowned.

"Well, some people believe there's a short cut to Dr. Bonne's practice. Then you don't do the hoops. You go straight through the curtain."

"Do you know where this curtain is?"

"Yes, they say it's at the same place as the last hoop. But I don't believe it is real. It's too easy. It bypasses the hoops. I love the hoops - especially this one here where we always have the celebrations. If we just continue doing the celebrations, Dr. Bonne will show up sometime, I'm sure. We're counting the days."

"So could you please tell me the short cut? Where's this curtain?"

"I told you: At the last hoop! Just follow the hoops."

"But that's no short cut! I want to shortcut the hoops!"

"Sorry." The sad man shrugged. "I cannot help you with that one. I always follow the hoops. I love them."

He paused, and drew closer to Chris.

"There is a short way, though", he whispered. "They say you have to listen for ... THE VOICE." He paused for effect.

"The VOICE? What VOICE? Whose VOICE?" Con's mind was racing, trying to make sense of the conversation.

The thin man drew away from Con and nonchalantly continued: "I cannot tell you more. I refrain from going into that stuff myself. That's spooky stuff. And VERY subjective. The people at the next hoop are all into that. They're a weird, noisy lot. I just follow the hoops. That's much easier and precise."

"Well, I think I'll have to run if I want to find the good doctor before closing time." Con stretched out his hand. "I've missed your name?"

"Hooper - Steven Hooper. But here they call me Ettienne", the thin man replied. "It's the same name, but Ettienne is better. It's French."

As Con strolled along in the direction of the fourth hoop, the thought of THE VOICE wouldn't leave him. Whose VOICE could this be? And how would one hear it when you don't know where it would be coming from? "Spooky business indeed" Con muttered to himself.

Then he became aware of a far-off noise of music, singing and somebody shouting over a loudspeaker system. The sound grew louder and louder as he approached. Arriving at the hoop, Con couldn't believe his eyes as he stared open-mouthed at the scene in front of him:

A band was playing away merrily and loudly on a makeshift stage to his left. In front of the band, on a vast expanse of green lawns, hundreds of people were dancing and singing, holding hands and laughing. Right in the middle of the dancers, a prominent man in a white suit, with a microphone, was encouraging them to sing louder and dance faster. The overall sound was deafening.

Suddenly a beautiful young girl left the dancing crowd and, on bare feet, came running towards Con. She went straight to the hoop and studied it intensely for a few moments before she turned around.

"Just checking!" she called to Con as she ran back to the dancing crowd.

"Checking WHAT?", Con yelled after her, but she had no chance of hearing him above the deafening music.

A plump middle-aged lady and two friends also huffed and puffed towards the hoop. Similarly, they studied it intensely for a few moments, and then seemed to have a difference of opinion. The plump lady kept on pressing her finger on a specific knot in the wood of one of the hoop's poles. In response, her one friend continually stroked her fingertips along the even grains of the wood, as she obviously challenged her plump friend's opinion. But then, surprisingly, they seemed to come to a sudden agreement, and

happily started off towards the dancing crowd again.

As they passed Con, he asked: "What were you doing there at the hoop?"

"Just checking" they answered. "One must always check THE VOICE."

"THE VOICE? Have you heard THE VOICE?" Con felt the excitement throbbing in his chest. "Is that man in the white suit with the microphone THE VOICE?" He pointed at the man whose voice was booming over the loudspeakers.

The three women looked at Con in utter amazement. Then they burst out laughing! "No, no, no, you have it all wrong!" the plump lady giggled. "He's just the superstar. We love him - we call him Pa-star. But he's not THE VOICE. He's just A VOICE of THE VOICE."

"Will he be able to tell me the short cut to dr. Good jr's practice? Or dr. Bonne?"

"Oh yes, he can. But he won't. He's too busy. He doesn't waste time with individual persons and their problems. He is a leader. He only works with crowds."

"But how will I then ever know the short cut?" Con was desperate.

"You need to join the crowd. Sometime he will tell the whole crowd how to get there. But most of us already know. So we invite new people - who don't know - to join the crowd. It's always nice when they join."

"So YOU know the short cut to dr. Good?" Con saw a spark of hope.

"Yes, we do. Come to my home on Wednesday evening - then we'll tell you how to get there. It's always nice when people join us at our homes." The plump lady smiled.

"But I don't want to join anywhere! I just need to get to dr. Good as soon as possible - else I'll die!"

"Then you need to listen to THE VOICE. THE VOICE will tell you about the curtain. But that can take time. You can never compel THE VOICE to speak to you. But you hear THE VOICE better and quicker when you don't eat." The plump lady had a stern look on her face.

"But where does this VOICE come from? What do I have to listen for?"

"Well, the hoops will tell you that: You never know where it would come from. It's like the wind. It blows from whichever direction."

The women left a baffled Con behind as they rejoined the crowd.

"Well, I guess that leaves me with the hoops again," Con muttered to himself as he jumped the hoop and started off towards the fifth hoop.

"That really hurt" he thought to himself. "The jumping makes my whole body ache every time."

Then a short, insignificant-looking man in a black suit and tie, sitting flat on his bum on the short grasses came into view. The man looked despondent, resting his arm on his black briefcase.

"Is this the road?" he asked when Con reached him.

"I believe so," Con replied. "If you want to get to Dr. Good jr."

"Are you sure? There are many hoops in the world, you know."

Con grinned. "For sure there are many hoops in the world. Why?"

The short man put his black briefcase on his lap and slowly opened it. He took out a huge black hardcover book. "Have you seen this?" he asked.

He slowly opened the book and, taking his time, paged through the pictured pages until he found the one he was looking for. Every page had a picture of one of the hoops Con had come to know so well - camera shots from every conceivable angle.

"Have you seen this?" he repeated as he pointed at the picture.

Con knelt down to see better. He recognized the hoop in the picture. It was the previous one he'd been to. The short man had his forefinger on a little sign at the bottom of the hoop.

"What is this?" Con asked.

"I'll show you," the short man replied, and turned the page to reveal a blown-up picture of the sign on the next page.

"Somebody had scratched this into the hoop with a sharp object - long ago," said the short man in a sad voice. "Can you see the arrow?"

"Yes, I do. And it points in a completely different direction than the perspex sign."

"You see, that's a BIG problem!" the short man lamented.

"But I guess that must have been just children playing?" Con objected.

"No, no, no. Look here!" The man paged through the book and triumphantly showed another picture of a hoop. "This one was found in Tibet. See? Exactly the same sign. And much older. And here's another one. From Egypt. Exactly the same. And another ... And another ..."

"So?" Con frowned.

"Well, it just comes to show you that you cannot simply follow the first sign that you see on a hoop!"

"But I won't follow any scratched signs. I follow the perspex signs! This is the road!" Con exclaimed.

"No, no, no. Look here." The short man paged further through the book. "See?" He pointed at a picture of yet another hoop that Con had never seen before. "That's the hoop that you find if you follow the scratched arrow! It took us years to discover that!"

"And does THAT hoop have a perspex sign on it?" Con was worried.

"For sure it does. And not one, but TWO scratched arrows. Each leading to another hoop."

"This man is dangerous - very dangerous." Con jumped as the thought struck his head. "Where did that come from?" Con was intrigued.

"What's your name? I need to hit the road." Con stretched out his hand.

"Theo Geek. You'll find my colleagues at the next hoop if you continue the way you came. Tell them you've spoken to me. They are even better qualified than I am, and will be able to help you even better. Remember the name: Theo Geek - Professor Theo Logi Geek from the Department of Hoop Science at the University of Doubtrecht. Here's my business card".

"You didn't help me much!", Con thought as he started walking again. "And you're downright dangerous!"

Arriving at the fifth hoop, Con couldn't believe his eyes. A small army of suit-and-tied men were assembled around this hoop - each carrying a clipboard and pen. In monkey-like fashion, everyone was studying the hoop in his own peculiar way: Some were scrutinizing the hoop with magnifying glasses, some were on ladders, taking pictures from unusual camera angles, and some were climbing the poles or clutching the hoop. Some were taking parts of the hoop assembly apart, and others were putting them together again. One was even tunnelling underneath it! Another was taking small samples of wood, plastic and perspex and carefully putting them into small plastic zipper bags for further analysis. A small team of men were erecting scaffolding around the hoop. Others were crawling around on all fours - looking to find objects or patterns in its immediate vicinity. A couple of men were even studying the tracks that the other men had made. Some distance from the hoop some others were sitting in camping chairs, spying out the whole business with binoculars!

All data obtained was carefully annotated onto the clipboards.

Con walked over to the men in the camping chairs. One middle-aged man rose from his chair as Con approached.

"Good day. I'm Professor Wes Lee from the Hoopla Department at the University of Systems. Please be seated."

"And I'm Con Demt. What on earth are you guys doing?" Con sat down in an empty camping chair. "Why are you all studying this hoop?"

"The hoops are the only things we can ever have as objects of objective study. Academic study should always be objective. We research everything about all the hoops objectively and scientifically."

"But why do you STUDY the hoops at all?"

"Well, it's a long story," prof. Lee said with a sigh. "At first the hoops were simply employed to find Dr. Good - and that was easy. But after a while people started to argue about how to interpret the road signs - the hoops. So we took it upon ourselves to study the hoops to find the correct way of interpreting them."

"But do you really need to go into so much effort and detail?"

"Well, the hoops have been studied for SO many years, and SO many books have been written about them - it's hard nowadays to find anything new to say or write about them." Again prof. Lee let out a deep sigh.

"But why don't you then stop examining them now?"

"Well, that's a long story as well. We feel we don't yet know everything there is to know about the hoops. And the Find-dr-Good system needs professors of Hoopology. Without us everything that's been built up over many years will simply fall apart."

"Well - I simply follow the perspex indicators. Is that the right way to do it?" Con asked anxiously.

"Well, if your only aim would be to find Dr. Good - that's fine. But that's a rather simplistic and naïve way of interpreting the hoops. There's a LOT more to them. More than meets the eye."

"Have YOU ever been to Dr. Good, prof?"

"Yes, long ago - when I was still a school boy. Those were great years. Many of us had tracked down Dr. Good. But I was never healed."

"Why not?"

"Well, you'll still meet Dr. Good. He's an excellent doctor, but extremely nosy. He wants to know your entire medical history and you have to mention every past illness. And expensive! He charges EVERYTHING you have as payment. You may physically keep it, but he wants you to transfer it onto his name - and then to manage it on his behalf. And then he wants to wash you in a bath of water!" Prof. Lee shrugged. "I guess I'm just not that kind of person."

"And?"

"And now I study the hoops. I like the intellectual stuff. And I teach others how to study the hoops. And how to interpret them - that's extremely important for getting to Dr. Good."

"What do you know about THE VOICE, prof?" Con couldn't believe he'd asked that. The thought had just suddenly popped into his mind.

Prof. Lee's eyes suddenly narrowed as he leaned forward towards Con. "Don't you dare ask me that question, young man!" he hissed through his teeth. "What makes you think that THE VOICE would speak to YOU? Who do you think you are?"

"Well, I've met some people along the way whom THE VOICE seems to speak to!" Con insisted. "I'm not going to let this opportunity slip by!" he thought by himself.

"Do you mean the noisy lot? Never mind! Don't take them too seriously. They're nice people, but they know very little about their own hoop. The VOICE business is a rather subjective business, and I prefer not to get involved with that!"

"In that case - I guess - I'm wasting my time here. I need to be off." Con rose from his chair.

"No, you're not wasting your time at all! Hoopology - you'll someday realize - is the very essence of finding Dr. Good. Hoopology will provide you with the framework into which you'll be able to fit everything we know about every single hoop, as well as everything we know about Dr. Good."

"And THE VOICE? Does THE VOICE also fit into the Hoopology framework?" Con could hardly conceal the deliberateness in his voice.

"Well, yeah. In Hoopology we've made a rule that THE VOICE may never say anything that does not correspond to our interpretation of the hoops. We've also devised a rather credible system of watertight rules in terms of which we interpret the hoops. We call the system Hoopetics. If a person had never studied Hoopology or Hoopetics, he might merely GET to Dr. Good by profanely jumping the hoops, yes, but you will never be able to correctly interpret any hoop." Prof. Lee coughed dryly.

"So all Hoopologists, as well as THE VOICE need to submit to Hoopology and Hoopetics for everything to work out neatly?"

"You're right on the money, young man! If any Hoopologist would disregard the agreed on rules, we simply shun him. And whenever THE VOICE would say anything that does not agree with our rules, we simply know that it had never really spoken. In that way, everyone toes the line." Prof. Lee had a satisfied grin on his face. "Hoopology and Hoopetics serve as the watchdogs of our knowledge about Dr. Hoop - sorry, I meant Dr. Good."

"But haven't the hoops been erected in the first place simply as a means to find Dr. Good?"

"If you view them profanely, yes. But there's SO much more to them: The plastic, the signs, the wood, the knots, the foundations, their history, their age - there's SO much to study!" Prof. Lee was elated. "I wrote my doctorate on the recurring theme of a minute, but discernable sulphur deposit on top of each suspending pole. It was SO unexpected! Today my thesis enjoys worldwide recognition as a breakthrough in worldwide Hoopology."

"Well, for a start I think simply finding Dr. Good 'profanely' would be good enough for me!" Con replied as he stretched out his hand. "Thank you for your informative conversation, sir!"

As he turned and walked off, two final questions shot into his mind. He turned back to Prof. Lee.

"Do you shun THE VOICE also when it speaks inappropriately?"

“Who can shun THE VOICE? Who could ever know whether it had spoken at all? Who can know whether it really exists? There are many who claim they’ve heard THE VOICE, but that whole idea is simply based in circumstantial and experiential evidence. And that constitutes a rather thin and subjective mandate – to say the least. If THE VOICE would really exist, it would speak through what we find in the hoops. The hoops – and studying them – is objective. And that’s all we’ll work with in Hoopology. Else there’s no control. And if there’s no control, Hoopology will cease to exist as a credible discipline. And that would be an utter disaster.”

“And have you ever thought about informing terminally ill people about Dr. Good and the hoops?”

“Well, yes. But that’s not my job,” Lee replied. “That’s for the guys in the marketing department of Hoopology. They’re a rather narrow-minded lot. They don’t know half as much as proper Hoopologists, and spend most of their working hours trying to convince simple, gullible people to look for Dr. Good. That’s not for me. I like to work with concepts and ideas and interacting with folks who thoroughly understand the structure of Hoopology.”

Irritated with Lee’s smugness, Con turned around and walked off. He elbowed his way through the army of suits and ties and quickly jumped the hoop. “Ouch!” he exclaimed as he went through. Then his head started to spin as his physical power suddenly left him. Without warning, a black darkness enveloped him – before his limp body dropped to the ground.

“Con! Con! Wake up!”

“As Con’s eyes fluttered open, he first distinguished the silhouette of a small figure bending over him. As the dizziness in his head dissipated and he was slowly able to focus, he recognized the little boy from the car park at Dr. Good’s practice. He was gently patting Con’s cheeks.

“You’ve done well” the boy said as Con slowly raised himself into a sitting position. “I’ll take you further. Things are getting dangerous now.”

Con looked around. To his utter amazement, he was about 100 yards from where he had parked his car on the tarmac.

“What on earth is going on? How did I get back here?”

“I brought you here”, the little lad replied. “After you blacked out. You won’t make another hoop on your own. Jumping hoops will kill you in the end.”

“But I need to get to Dr. Good jr.! And now you’ve brought me back all the way!” Frustrated, Con hit the ground with his fist. “I’ve wasted a whole day!”

“You could have invited me along in the first place,” the little lad replied with a broad grin. “Then I could have told you about the curtain and THE VOICE along the way. You’ve wasted your own time.”

“You knew about the curtain and THE VOICE all the time? Why didn’t you tell me in the first place?” Con was disappointed.

“You never asked!” The boy’s grin grew even wider.

“But I didn’t KNOW about the curtain and THE VOICE when I started out here!” Con responded indignantly.

“That’s why you had to do the hoops first – to learn about the curtain and THE VOICE!”

“But you’re just a little boy – what would you know about the curtain or THE VOICE?”

The boy’s eyes narrowed. “There is but little that I don’t know, Con. In fact, I cannot think of anything that I don’t know!” Then he burst out laughing at his own logical fun!

Still laughing, he took Con by the hand and pulled him onto his feet. For his size, he seemed to be incredibly strong. “I need to show you something. Come and have a look at your sixth hoop.”

He led Con by the hand to where a number of men were quietly working on one of the hoops he’d come to know so well. Both Con and the boy stopped and watched in silence.

One man was taking the Perspex signs off the hoop. Another was carving at the wooden poles and plastic hoop with a sharp object. Another was adding big lumps of putty to the structure. Two men were struggling to bend the plastic hoop out of shape. About ten yards away, two freshly dug holes were made in the ground into which new poles could fit. And two men were digging at the bases of the existing poles in order to remove them. Everything happened in dead silence.

“What on earth are they doing?”, Con whispered.

“They are changing my hoops,” the boy whispered back. “They want it to be more convenient – and to

blend in with their style of living and their philosophy.”

“YOUR hoops? If they would tamper with it enough, nobody would be able to find Dr. Good jr. any more!”

“Exactly. But they aren’t concerned about that at all. All they want is to stop the hoops from offending them.”

“Would it still be safe to jump that hoop?”, Con asked anxiously.

“You needn’t jump it. As long as you do what I say, you will get to Dr. Good jr. That’s why THE VOICE is so important. The hoops are worthless – and outright dangerous – without THE VOICE. They will kill you in the end if you don’t heed THE VOICE.”

Con was stunned. After digesting the boy’s words for a few moments, he hesitantly asked: “Do you mean to say that YOU are THE VOICE?” He found himself staring at the boy open-mouthed, with his forefinger pointing at him.

“I’ve hoped all along that you would get it,” the boy replied with a wide grin. “It had been me speaking in your thoughts all along your journey – when you thought they were just random thoughts popping up in your mind.”

“Are you serious? Do you mean you can speak within my head?” Con couldn’t believe his ears.

“Con, I can do whatever I want. And I know whatever there is to know.” The boy paused. “But we’re wasting time. Let’s get to the seventh hoop so I can show you the curtain and introduce you to Dr. Good jr.”

As the boy led him by the hand, Con’s thoughts raced through his mind. There was almost too much to digest. He needed more time, but the boy led him straight towards Dr. Good sr.’s practice.

Arriving at the front door where Con had entered earlier that day, where the door had been before, they found a thick, scarlet curtain made from heavy fabric. The sweet aroma of incense hung in the air.

Then, without warning, the boy collapsed at Con’s feet! Immediately, ugly gurgling sounds started to proceed from his throat.

Startled, Con bent over him as he saw blood pouring from his bare hands and feet. Even his shirt showed a huge red stain.

But before Con could do anything, a loud, slow, gut-wrenching, ripping sound emanated from the curtain. As Con watched in astonishment, the entire curtain ripped apart in two halves – from top to bottom. As the two halves fell away from one another, a beaming young adult in his thirties came from behind – with his arms flung open.

“Welcome! Welcome, Rea!”, he called. “We’ve been waiting for you all day!”

Con couldn’t help but notice that the young man looked a lot like the little boy who had just dropped dead.

“Have we met before?”, Con asked as he stepped across the dead boy’s body to greet the man. “I’m afraid you have a casualty right here on your doorstep.”

“Yes, we have met before indeed. I’m Dr. Good jr. Can I introduce you to my dad?”

“But what about the boy here behind me? He needs immediate medical attention!”

“What boy?” Dr. Good jr. was feigning seriousness.

When Con looked around, the boy was gone!

“That boy, Rea, was me. I had to die to rend the curtain for you. But come; let me introduce you to my dad!”

“Why do you call me ‘Rea’?” My name is Conrad – I’m Con Demt.”

“No, you’re NOT! My dad’s changed all that. But come; let me introduce you.”

“But I have already met him this morning.”

“I know. But then you were still Con Demt. I want to introduce you to him with your new name!”

Con reluctantly followed Dr. Good jr. down the corridor. The young doctor opened a door to his left and triumphantly announced:

“Father, let me introduce you to my most recent follower: Mr. Rea Deemt!”

As Rea was ushered into the room, Dr. Good sr. was sitting behind his desk with a broad grin.

“Welcome, Rea. You have done well to find my son. Please have a seat.”

He paused.

“Can we talk about your previous illnesses now? And bathing? And payment ... ?”

Comments:

I know far too many Christians who have an excellent relationship with their Bibles, but no personal relationship with Jesus by the Holy Spirit.

I know far too many Christians for whom Christianity is nothing more than an intellectual concept derived from their Bibles, and who have no personal relationship with the ever-present Holy Spirit.

I know far too many Christians who have no experiential knowledge of the supernatural reality of our Comforter (although the Bible is expressly clear on this fact).¹

I know far too many Christians who are blissfully oblivious of, or don't even recognize the fact that they themselves possess a human spirit (although the Bible is unambiguously clear on that fact).²

I know far too many Christians who believe that the Holy Spirit only speaks via the Bible (although the Bible expressly contradicts this notion).³

I know far too many Christians who believe that our Christian walk is primarily via the Bible, and hence via our intellect (although the Bible expressly says that we primarily live by the Holy Spirit).⁴

I know far too many Christians who believe that the only way to access God's Word is via the Bible (although the Bible expressly contradicts this notion).⁵

Please don't get me wrong on this. I have absolutely no qualms with the Bible. I believe that every word of the Bible is the truth. I love and cherish it as a prized gift from God to mankind. I don't intend to violate the Bible in whichever way.

But I do believe that Christians have made of the Bible something that it was never intended to be: An idol.

The problem is not with the Bible as such. The problem is with what man has made of the Bible.

(This is not the first time in history that God's people have made an idol from a Godly gift that was intended for good!).⁶

Let's get a couple of facts straight:

1. Christianity is not "the religion of the Bible". Christianity is a living, day-to-day personal relationship with a Person - a relationship with Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit (not necessarily through the Bible: few Christians ever had access to physical parts of Scripture for the first 1500 years of Christianity. And even if they had, most wouldn't have been able to read them!).

2. The Bible is not God or Jesus. It is but one of many ways by which God reveals Himself to mankind. Although the Bible is certainly Godly, the scroll, book or text file is definitely not God. And although the Bible says that the Word became flesh (in Jesus),⁷ that very verse itself hadn't even been written down yet at the time when Jesus was born (so how could that have been part of the Word that became Jesus?).

3. The Bible is not a goal in itself. It is a means to a Goal - the Goal being Jesus. As soon as we make the Bible a goal in itself, we have missed the plot, and are engaging in idolatry.

In terms of our story above: Whenever we make the Bible a goal in itself, we "pitch our camp" at some or other Biblical hoop or road sign - with Dr. Good long forgotten. And we repeatedly study and jump our favourite, idolatrous hoops.

4. The Bible never says of itself that it is the Word of God. At best, the Bible says that the Old Testament is the Word of God. If we believe the entire Bible to be the Word of God, then we do so by a choice of our wills - not because the Bible says so (we simply cannot substantiate this belief from the Bible!). The Bible calls the events of the New Testament the "testimony/witness of Jesus".⁸

5. The Bible is expressly clear on the fact that Jesus (Who is NOT equivalent to the Bible!) is the Word of God.⁹

6. The Bible never even says that the entire Bible was inspired by the Holy Spirit. At best, it says so of the Old Testament¹⁰, simply because the New Testament, as we know it today, had not even existed at the writing of that verse. Finality on the compilation of the entire Bible was not reached until about 300 AD. If we believe that the whole Bible was inspired by the Holy Spirit, then we do so by a choice of our wills - not because the Bible says so (we simply cannot substantiate this belief from the Bible!).

7. The Bible, stripped of the Holy Spirit, is a dead book. Well-known ways of stripping the Bible of the Holy Spirit are the academic, intellectual, doctrinal, institutional, sectarian, legalistic, religious,

traditional, occult and systematic avenues.

8. Treating the Bible without the Holy Spirit is always lethal, since the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.¹¹ Also, the Old Covenant is a covenant of death.¹²

9. The Bible never claims itself to be the only vehicle by which God speaks to mankind.

10. By believing the Bible to be a canon (which means “measuring rod”), we make a choice of our wills (not because the Bible says so!) to employ the Bible as the standard by which we measure everything in life. Everything that contradicts it, we reject. Everything it teaches, we embrace, believe and do. Once again, if we believe that the whole Bible as we know it today is a canon, then we do so by choice - not because the Bible teaches us so. We simply cannot substantiate this belief from the Bible.

11. The Bible teaches vast truths and many answers, but it does not contain all truth or have an answer for every question in life. That’s what we’ve been given the Holy Spirit for - for He will guide us into ALL truth.¹³ He might often do so via the Bible, but He might also do so via many other avenues, like words of knowledge or wisdom, prophecy,¹⁴ etc.

This fact is offensive to many Christians who, for some unbiblical reason, choose to believe that God only speaks through the Bible.

12. The Reformation slogan (1500’s) of *Sola Scriptura!* (the Scriptures alone!) was historically intended to fill the authority vacuum which had developed via the protestant denial of the ultimate authority of the Catholic Pope on all spiritual matters - hence the Greek New Testament was mockingly referred to as “the paper Pope” in the sixteenth century.

Historically, *Sola Scriptura!* simply expressed the reformed sentiment that not the Catholic Pope, but the Bible has the final authority and say in all matters spiritual. It was never intended to mean what church leaders have today made of it, i.e. to mean that our every ounce of spiritual nourishment and knowledge springs forth from the Bible and the Bible alone. Not even the Bible makes this claim about itself. This interpretation of *Sola Scriptura!* is, ironically, unbiblical.

And once again, if we believe that the Bible has the final authority in all matters spiritual, we do so by choice - not because the Bible teaches us so. We simply cannot substantiate this belief from Scripture.

13. The Bible is no “magic wand”. Contrary to what most Christians would like to believe, the Bible is extensively employed in the occult world to substantiate occult doctrines and teachings, to do magic with, as well as to perform evil via curses, hexes and spells.

If you now feel as if the carpet has been pulled from underneath you, then you are most certainly rooted in the Bible, but not in Jesus. We need to be primarily rooted in Jesus - not primarily in the Bible.

Shall we repent of our Bible idol now?

1. John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7.

2. Gen. 2:7, 41:8; Ex. 35:21; Deut. 2:30; Jud. 15:19; 1 Sam. 30:12; Prov. 16:32; Dan. 2:1; Acts 17:16; 2 Cor. 7:13.

3. Acts 9:4, 10, 11,15; 10:19; 11:28; 13:2, 9; 18:9; 21:11; 23:11; 26:25.

4. Joh. 6:63; Rom. 8:4, 5, 13; Gal. 3:3, 5:16, 25; 1 Pet. 4:6; 1 Joh. 3:24, 4:13.

5. Acts 9:4, 10, 11,15; 10:19; 11:28; 13:2, 9; 18:9; 21:11; 23:11; 26:25.

6. 2 Kings 18:4.

7. John 1:14.

8. Rev. 1:2, 9, 6:9, 20:4.

9. John 1:1 - 4; Rev. 19:13.

10. 2 Tim. 3:16.

11. 2 Cor. 3:6.

12. 2 Cor. 3:7.

13. John 16:13.

14. 1 Cor. 12:8, 10.

Systems

A regular guy lived in the fifth house on a crooked street in a regular city.

He had a wife, a son, a daughter, a cat, a dog - and a budgie in a cage. He also had two regular cars in his double garage, a small swimming pool in his paved back yard and a flatscreen TV in his lounge.

Every morning the regular guy would put on his shirt and tie, get into his car and drive off to his one-man business. His loving wife would stay at home to look after and home school their teenage son and daughter in a Christian worldview.

In the evenings they would have supper together, have devotions and watch some TV before the kids would go to bed.

Both the regular guy and his wife served the Lord. They would pray to Him every day to bless and keep them. To look after their possessions, personal safety, income, health, children's education and faith. They thanked and praised the Lord whenever they were in good health, had enough money to pay their bills and could sleep peacefully and snugly at night. They were keen on living holy lives, so that the Lord would protect and bless them and so that no curse would befall them. They were content with what the Lord had granted them as a family.

Then, one day, the guy's car got stolen in broad daylight in the car park at his business.

The guy was shocked. The police investigated. "Are you insured?", they asked.

"No," he said. "I trust the Lord to look after us."

"I would strongly advise you to get insurance", the officer said. "This kind of thing happens more often every day".

"I should trust the Lord to look after me", the guy said. "And to return unto me what I have lost."

So, one evening after work, a man in a suit and tie and a briefcase arrived at their home.

"We have the perfect system for recoument of any future loss by theft", he said. "For a few hundred rands per month you can become part of our system. Not only for your car, but also for the contents of your home."

"Let's get it," said the wife. "I'm afraid we might lose even more if we only trust the Lord."

So the regular guy signed on the dotted line.

He never got his car back. And he paid thousands of rands every year for the system privilege of not losing anything more by theft.

His wife was happy. "Now my possessions are safe", she said.

That night they prayed for their personal safety, income, health, children's education and faith. And praised God that their possessions were now properly looked after.

Then, one night, burglars broke into their house while they were asleep.

The robbers held the family at gunpoint, and stole their flatscreen TV, their sound system, the son's laptop and the daughter's ipod - and drove away in their remaining car.

The whole family was shocked and traumatized. The wife cried a lot. The police investigated. "Are you insured?", they asked the guy.

"Yes", he said. "My wife trusts the insurance system to look after us."

"Very well", the officer said. "That's the proper way to deal with crime".

"Yes", said his wife. "Where was the Lord last night? We should be grateful that we are still alive!"

"We should trust the Lord to look after us", the guy said. "And to return unto us what we have lost."

"But I want security", said his wife.

So, the next evening after work, the man in a suit and tie and a briefcase arrived at their home once again.

"We have the perfect system for looking after your safety", he said. "For a few hundred rands per month you can become part of our system. Not only for yourself, but also for whoever stays on your premises."

"Let's get it," said the wife. "I'm afraid next time somebody might get injured or even killed."

So the regular guy signed on the dotted line.

He got his TV, sound system, his son's laptop, the daughter's ipod and his car back. But his wife never lost her fear of burglars at night. And he paid thousands of rands every year for the system privilege of having his premises patrolled by the neighbourhood security company. His wife was happy, but fearful -

despite the security she gained.

That night they prayed for their income, health, children's education and faith. And praised God that their possessions and personal safety were now properly looked after.

The whole family relaxed, because they now had systems looking after their possessions and personal security. So they needn't live holy lives anymore. The guy started to flirt with his secretary at work, his wife gossiped about others, the son played occultic computer games on his laptop and the daughter listened to bad music on her ipod.

As long as you pay them, systems don't care whether you live holy or not.

Then the economy slumped.

The guy's business took a bad turn: Business costs soared, his profit margins were cut and he struggled to pay his bills and secretary. At his office, tensions soared as responsibilities and financial pressures increased day by day.

The guy had a meeting with his wife.

"Shouldn't I rather sell the business and get a regular salaried job?" he asked her. "Or should we trust God that things will work out for us?"

"A regular job is a good idea", his wife said. "All these tensions are getting to our relationship and marriage. Is that really what God wants for us? I want security."

So, the next evening after work, the man in a suit and tie and a briefcase arrived at their home once again. He offered to sell the guy's business for him, and to find him a job.

The guy signed on the dotted line, because he was sick and tired of all the trouble and tensions.

The man with the briefcase sold his business for far below its market value, and found a handsomely paying regular salaried job for the guy at a company.

Now the guy would receive a guaranteed salary in his bank account at the end of each month - for as long as he worked for the company seven hours per day, five days per week, and kept his boss happy.

That night they prayed for their health, children's education and faith. And praised God that their possessions, personal safety and income were now properly looked after.

Since the guy didn't have a secretary anymore, he now flirted with the ladies in his office. His wife continued to gossip and slander, his son went to a LAN party where he and his friends played occultic games on their laptops, and his daughter went to a rock concert where she was offered drugs.

Then one morning, after she'd showered, the regular guy's wife told him: "I've felt a lump in my left breast". Her voice quivered.

"We need to have it checked out", the guy said. "I'll make an appointment for you at the doctor".

So that afternoon she went to see the doctor.

"What's the verdict?" the guy asked as he got home from work.

"Sit down", his wife said. "I have breast cancer." Her voice quivered and her face was ashen. "I need to receive radiation and chemotherapy."

Together they wept and wept.

So, the next evening after work, the man in a suit and tie and a briefcase arrived at their home once again.

"I can arrange for you for medical aid at the company where you work", he said. "For a few hundred rands per month you can become part of their system. Not only for your wife, but also for yourself and your children.

"Let's get it," said the wife. "We won't be able to pay for all the medical expenses of my illness."

So the guy signed on the dotted line. "You're such a good man to know!", he told the guy with the briefcase.

That night they prayed for their children's education and their faith. And praised God that their possessions, personal safety, income and health were now properly looked after.

At work, the guy became emotionally attached to a particular lady who was very sympathetic about his wife's illness. His wife became angry towards God because of her cancer. Their son immersed himself into his computer games. Their daughter started to hear voices speaking to her from her rock music.

A few months into the radiation and chemotherapy, the wife told the regular guy: "I just cannot continue the home schooling any more. I simply feel too weak and nauseous."

So after a long talk with their son and daughter, they decided to put them in a regular government school - where they had to follow the curriculum prescribed by the government of the day.

"I'm sure your children will be very happy in our school", the headmaster told the parents. "We have a proud history and tradition, and excellent academic results every year. Be well soon!" he told the wife.

The guy and his wife were happy that their children would be in a good school. That night they prayed for their faith. And praised God that their possessions, personal safety, income, health and children's education were now properly looked after.

That night their home group gathered at their house to pray for the wife's health.

"Do you believe that God can heal you?" the leader asked the wife.

"Of course I believe that!" she replied. "He is Almighty God. He can do anything! Don't we read that in the Bible?"

So the home group prayed for the wife's healing. They also prayed that the couple's faith would not fail.

Six months later, after much suffering, the wife died.

The guy, his son and daughter grieved over their wife and mom for long.

Fortunately the guy had bought her a funeral policy from the guy with the briefcase - so she was laid to rest properly and with dignity.

The sympathetic lady at his work divorced her husband and married the guy.

After many years of service at the company, they retired at the seaside with their company pensions.

The guy could never understand why his son and daughter, who had married and divorced, never had enough faith to serve the Lord. Their unbelief broke his heart. He continued to pray that they would have faith.

*A thousand may fall at your side,
ten thousand at your right hand,
but it will not come near you.*

You will only observe with your eyes and see the punishment of the wicked.

If you make the Most High your dwelling

- even the LORD, who is my refuge -

then no harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent.

- Ps. 91:7 - 10.

When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?

- Luke 18:8.

Comments:

The two biblical kings Saul and David were subjected to almost similar tests of faith.

Saul flunked almost every test, whilst David passed almost every one.

Consequently, Saul's royal line was terminated, whilst that of David was established for eternity.

The only test of faith that the above couple had passed, was the most basic one that we are all subjected to: Faith for salvation.

However, they failed every single subsequent test of their faith in God. Each and every time, they've opted to put their faith in a man-made SYSTEM, rather than in God. Their motive: FEAR.

In our day, trust and faith in man-made systems, rather than in God, have become so commonplace among Christians that we scarcely give it a second thought. We consider them to be essential pillars of our earthly existence.

Systems erode and undermine our faith in God.

They are costly, faceless, impersonal, disempowering, addictive and enslaving. They create a false sense of security and peace of mind, and are based in the worldly principles of belief in whatever is visible, financial profit and unbelief in God's provision and protection.

The question could rightly be asked:

When one has expressed so many votes of no confidence in God as the couple above, could one then still ask God to heal one's terminal illness? Why trust God with your health if you continually vote no confidence in Him for your possessions, safety, income or education?

Whatever one sows, one will reap¹:

If one sows to please the Spirit, one will reap eternal life.

If one sows to please the sinful nature, from that nature one will reap death and destruction.² Ditto for sowing unto systems for fear and unbelief.

Surely it does not necessarily constitute sin to be part of a system.

But as soon as the system becomes a substitute for faith, it becomes a manifestation of unbelief - and sin. Many who have never been without these systems to "back up" their faith have no idea what faith for everyday living is - because this "back-up" has always served as a substitute for healthy Christian faith. They have never felt any need for strengthening their feeble faith muscles.

Here's a litmus test for your faith in systems, as opposed to your faith in God:

Notify your short term insurance, security company and medical aid that you won't be paying any installments for the next month, after which you will resume normal payments - with the understanding that you won't be covered by these systems for the next month.

What a wonderful way to make a baby step vote of confidence in God!

But that's not the litmus test itself. Here's the real test:

What does your internal FEAR GAUGE say about this idea?

If the mere thought of dropping these "back-ups" makes your heart throb for anxiety, then you're in sin. The sin of unbelief.

And here's a second one:

For the fear of God, a person who has God for his only provider and protection, and no systems to back him up, has to live a holy life before Him. If having to live such a holy life seems to deter you, then you're in sin. Then your back-up systems have even substituted your fear of God.

The just shall live by faith - not by sight³ or systems.

And even if you would drop your back-up systems, and trust God, that does not mean that you would have a smooth, uneventful life. That your car won't be stolen. That your house won't be burgled. That your daughter won't be caught up in drugs. That your wife won't get cancer. These things happen. That's life.

Godly kings and judges in the Bible got threatened by evil many times.

And they were always advised not to trust in Egypt or Assyria. Or in alliances. Or on princes or horses. But to trust in God.

"God's insurance" pays out much more handsomely than insurance companies.

The just shall live by faith - not by sight³ or systems.

Faith, by nature, always harbours an element of uncertainty, because faith starts where certainty ends. But the uncertainty factor in faith needn't constitute fear.

Shall we repent of our system idols now?

[For those who didn't know: This is no empty talk on my side.

My family and I have lived the life of faith for the past 18 years. For the past 18 years we haven't had any fixed income, short term insurance, medical aid, hospital plan or even pension fund.

We've only had God and God's people.

And after 18 years, I can merely say that God has provided for us, and protected us, for 18 years. I still cannot say what might happen tomorrow. But in Christ I've learnt to conquer my fear of tomorrow. And we've learnt to flex our muscles of faith, which have become much stronger than they've been 18 years ago.

Faith is the only thing we have that pleases God. Everything else is sin.⁴

In the process, we've been lovingly, but sternly disciplined by God. Most of the time, when things have gone wrong, it had been because we (usually I!) had stepped out of line. Then I had to search my own heart and deeds, and to repent of my own folly.

Yes, our car was stolen. Yes, we and our boys got ill. Yes, we've had to pay school fees, doctors' bills, car breakages, municipal rates and income tax like everybody else. Yes, we've suffered embarrassment and even humiliation occasionally. Many times we've cried out to God to save us from predicaments.

And now one of these days our oldest son will get married. And God has provided and protected through all of this.

In the process, we've been privileged to see and experience several of God's secrets that few others ever see or even conceptualise. And we're not enslaved to any system anymore. We're free!

I still have no idea what tomorrow might bring. But thus far, God has seen us through!^{5]}

1. Gal. 6:7.

2. Gal. 6:8.

3. Hab. 2:4; Rom. 1:17; 2 Cor. 5:7; Gal. 2:20; 3:11; Heb. 10:38.

4. Rom. 14:23.

5. 1 Sam. 7:12.