

Commentary – From the Margins

The Teaching of Hubris

The teaching ministries of television evangelists, built upon the tithes and offerings of businessmen and bib-overall farmers, factory workers and social security recipients, advocate sowing seed in the good soil of ground they own, that seed growing into the finer things of life for the televangelists. Their telethons encourage viewers to pledge amounts far above what viewers can afford; even to encouraging viewers to borrow the tithe of the amounts pledged if necessary. They promise their viewers increased material wealth – and they join with other televangelists to bilk billions from those whom they profess to serve, while teaching a flawed gospel to their audience. They bilk billions from their viewers for starving children in sub-Saharan Africa, and in the Philippines; for water wells in southern Africa; for street children in South American cities; for children in Russian and Chinese orphanages; for Bibles for Chinese Christians (but only the New Testament). Each of these ministries receives support after the cost of raising the money is deducted, that cost to include the televangelists' salaries.

When Jesus' disciples came to Him on the Mount of Olives to ask about the end of the age and the sign of His return, He first described what would lead up to the birth of many heirs of God (Matt 24:4-7), saying, "All these things are but the beginning of the birth pains" (v. 8). He then described the birth pains themselves: "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you shall be hated by all nations for my name's sake. And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold" (vv. 9-12). So the birth pains of Israel, the woman of Revelation 12, will have disciples being martyred, being hated by the world because they are Christians; will have disciples falling away and betraying one another; will have many false prophets leading many disciples astray through teaching lawlessness; will have the love of many disciples growing cold. So far, these birth pains don't offer disciples much hope. The carrot, though, that keeps disciples going is, "But the one who endures to the end shall be saved" (v. 13).

Jesus said, "And this gospel [good news] of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come" (Matt 24:14). What good news? The good news that He delivered in the preceding sentence, that the one who endures to the end shall be saved. This is the good news that will be proclaimed worldwide before the end comes. Not a gospel about Christ's soon-coming kingdom. Not a gospel about the mighty works of Christ. Disciples have already heard about His mighty deeds. They know that He will shortly return. They recognize that a man of perdition has come. They recognize the meteor strike is what John describes in Revelation when he says that he saw a smoking mountain thrown into the sea. But they expected Christ to protect them from carnage occurring all around them.

They expected to be raptured, or to be in a physical place of safety. They truly didn't expect to be killed, tortured, imprisoned, hunted like wild beasts -- during the hard labor of Israel's birth pains, disciples are betraying one another, hating one another, practicing lawlessness [sin – from 1 John 3:4], being martyred, quitting on Christ. Being a Christian who doesn't practice sin has become too difficult for too many disciples. Too many false prophets are teaching disciples lies. And what disciples need is some good news – that good news has already been given: all who endure to the end shall be saved. And the end will not come until this good news is proclaimed worldwide.

A Catch-22 situation? If Satan can keep the good news of all who endure to the end shall be saved from being proclaimed to the world, he can prevent the end of the age from occurring. He can indefinitely extend his reign as the spiritual king of Babylon (Isa 14:4-21). He rules over the mental topography of humanity through being the prince of the power of the air (Eph 2:2). And if he can prevent the Church from proclaiming the good news that all who endure in faith to the end will be saved, that all who endure the spiritual birth pains of Israel will become the glorified sons of God, he will not be cast from heaven. He will have foiled God's plan for humanity. And with the Church being delivered into his hands for its good, he truly believes he can thwart Christ, that he will have stalemated God. And that thinking is the epitome of hubris.

Yes, Satan as spiritual king of Babylon believes that because Israel was delivered into mental captivity to him – just as YHWH sent the physical nation into physical captivity in Babylon -- he can control what the Christian Church teaches. The evidence is all around him. He has compromised every reform ministry undertaken. Today, the worldwide teaching ministries of televangelists proclaim a message of lawlessness. They preach Christ and Christ crucified, and they are proud that they teach the Cross. But they do not teach disciples to live within the laws of God, which form the spiritual boundaries of Eden, the garden of God. Rather they teach disciples to commit spiritual suicide by spurning the laws of God – and for teaching disciples to commit suicide, they reward themselves handsomely. After all, they should be well paid, for they have been very successful.

The man Jesus of Nazareth -- the Logos who was God [Theos] and who was with God [Theon] (John 1:1-2, 14) -- was sacrificed on a cross at Calvary. This is a historic truth to all Christians. He was removed from the cross by Joseph of Arimathea and by Nicodemus, and He was entombed with about seventy-five pounds of spices at dusk on the 14th of Nissan (John 19:38-42). He was the paschal Lamb of God, sacrificed for the sins of Israel. And here is where the teaching ministries of the many televangelists fail: as the Lamb of God, He was sacrificed from the foundation of the earth. The six hours between when the paschal lamb is sacrificed to when the death angel passed through Egypt killing all firstborns not covered by the lamb's blood represents that period between when the Lamb of God was slain and Israel is liberated from bondage to sin. Those six hours have become six thousand years, or the conclusion of the sixth day of creation week (Gen 1:1-31).

All of Israel will be liberated from mental bondage on the second Passover – this begins the hard labor of Israel giving birth to many sons of God, for the world will suddenly hate Christians for being Christians, for Christ's name sake. Why? Because the firstborns

of the world will have been slain. All firstborns not covered by the blood of the Lamb of God will be dead. Presidents. Prime ministers. Business leaders. All will be dead if the person is a firstborn not covered by the blood of the Lamb. The nation of China will be hurled back into the abyss, because of the nation's one-child policy coupled to its political disdain for Christ. Either that or the leaders of the nation will repent, will accept Christ as their personal savior, and will use their political muscle to get their citizens into Passover services even though televangelists will decry their sudden turn toward Christ as legalism.

The empty cross is not a symbol of Christ's resurrection, but a statue to the murder weapon by which the Lamb of God was slain. It symbolically represents the stake to which disciples are tethered as if they were goats. Disciples are to break that tether and to follow Christ. They are to unshackle themselves from the world. They are in the world, but they are not to be a part of it. They are to live by the laws of God that have been written on their hearts and minds (Heb 8:10) when they were drawn from the world by the Father (John 6:44, 65). They are not to teach or to practice lawlessness. To do so marks them as being of the synagogue of Satan.

Hubris as a concept is perhaps best exemplified by King Agamemnon in the play by the same name. This powerful warrior king could have certainly slain his assassin if the king would have seen the attack coming. He had to be slain by ambush – and to get him to walk close enough by the ambush point where he could be killed, his wife rolled out a red carpet. As king and conquering warrior returning home victorious, Agamemnon walked on the red carpet, a representation of tremendous labor and expenditure of resources. He walked on the labor of his wife – and he was murdered because he had the audacity to think himself worthy of treading on a red carpet, on the labor of others.

The teaching ministries of the many televangelists have the audacity to promise their viewers that God will materially bless viewers if they will sow seed in good ground. They commit God to giving material blessings to spiritual Israelites who should be storing up treasure in heaven, not in mortgage payments. They teach a cruel variation of the Apostle Paul's doubly accursed gospel, which would have disciples first becoming physical Israelites (i.e., Israelites in the flesh) before they could become spiritual Israelites (i.e., Israelites in hearts and minds). These televangelists promise to those who will send them money the material blessings of the abolished Sinai covenant (Eph 2:15) while teaching their viewers not to keep the laws of God that have been written on disciples' hearts and minds. They teach their viewers to commit spiritual suicide while committing God to materially prospering those who plan for their resurrection to condemnation.

Today's televangelists follow unwittingly in the tradition of Herbert Armstrong, who promised his disciples that they would figuratively put the frosting on the universe as if all of God's creation were a cake baked for the express purpose of being decorated. Herbert Armstrong had his disciples annually sending his administrative headquarters ten percent of their income, plus offerings. In addition, his disciples were to save an additional ten percent of their incomes to attend the annual festivals, where they could give a portion of this second ten percent to headquarters as offering. Then on every third and sixth year of a seven-year cycle, his disciples were to send to headquarters a third

ten percent of their income as a widow and orphan tithe. And Herbert Armstrong used advertising techniques to "sell" his disciples upon the necessity of sowing their tithes and offering into his work – he claimed that God only worked through one man at a time, and he was the man.

Well, God does only work through one man, that man being Christ Jesus. To believe that God only works through one human being at a time takes considerable hubris, especially if you are that human being. Few of today's televangelists have that degree of hubris with the noticeable exception of Gerald Flurry, who has idolized Herbert Armstrong.

Disciples are to tithe. There is a second tithe, and a third tithe – and altogether, they equal ten percent of one's increase, not one's income. And they are to go to the disciple's local church, if the disciple has one. But paying tithes does not commit God to prospering a disciple materially. God chooses whether He will commit Himself to anything. And under the Sinai covenant, He committed Himself to giving Israel material wealth in exchange for national obedience. That commitment ended at Calvary, but remains dynamic. If, as a nation, the United States did not steal, the security industry would collapse, but in its place would be an overall reduction in the cost of goods and services. If the nation didn't practice adultery, the pornography industry would collapse, but far fewer marriages would break up, resulting in greater family cohesion, fewer traumatized children, and greater mental health and wealth. The list goes on. So the promises of national prosperity for national obedience to the laws of God are dynamic principles around which societies should organize themselves. We have the expression, A rising tide raises all ships, which addresses the question of national prosperity for national obedience.

It takes on the part of a televangelist as much hubris to commit God to materially prospering the person who gives money to the televangelist as it took for Herbert Armstrong to claim that his work was the only work of God being done on earth. This is especially true when the salaries of Herbert Armstrong's top ministers and the salaries of today's televangelists are compared to the incomes of the disciples who gave/give to these ministries.

The Apostle Paul said that he supported not only himself but those with him through his work as a tentmaker. Yes, he received help from various churches; and yes, he was entitled to that assistance. But he didn't pay himself a \$300,000 salary (in 1967 dollars) as Herbert Armstrong did, nor did he build himself a 1.1 million-dollar home as one major televangelist recently did.

Jesus told His disciples to sell all they had and follow Him. He gave the same advice to the rich young ruler who asked what he must do to receive eternal life. And what He said was same thing that Paul said: a disciple is to break whatever tethers him or her to the world. The disciple is to follow Christ at the expense of everything that would restrict following. The disciple doesn't need to take a vow of poverty – the disciple will become involved in situations that just work out that way, for the world loves its own. It doesn't love those who would overturn it. But that is what Christ is all about. Disciples are to participate in overturning the world, not with physical force but through the coming of the kingdom of God.

The end of the age will not come until the good news that all who endure to the end shall be saved is proclaimed to the world as a witness and a warning. This message is going out today from The Philadelphia Church, a small but growing association of autonomous fellowships, united in declaring this gospel. And the extent to which this gospel must be proclaimed will be determined by the Father. For the sake of all firstborn disciples who have never taken the Passover as Christ ordained the service, pray that a greater proclamation of this gospel is necessary than is presently being done.

I will repeat myself so there can be no mistake about what I have written. The teaching ministries of today's television evangelists advocate committing spiritual suicide. They are false teachers. They are charlatans. And they teach other ministries to practice the same hubris of which they are guilty; i.e., committing God to promises He made in a covenant nailed to the Cross.

If someone were bold enough to claim I am guilty of hubris for trying to save the person's eternal life while attacking the Cross, then I will plead guilty when the one making the claim can show how I have materially prospered from this ministry beyond the level of a school teacher. I will, though, admit to mischief against all who would walk on red carpets, beginning with the ministries that keep alive the work of Herbert Armstrong.

* * * * *

"Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved."