

UPON THE ROCK

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Upon the Rock is published monthly for the purpose of setting forth sound biblical material concerning first-principles and evangelism. We strive to print articles that are informative for Christians and non-Christians

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STRANGE GODS

(Joshua 24:14-24)

Edd Sterchi

The whole context of Joshua 24 is that of the Israelites again ratifying the covenant with God. All the tribes are gathered together, and a brief history of their people, their escape from Egypt, and the conquest of Canaan is recounted in verses 1-13. And now it is time to renew their faith in God, to again accept His will, and to devote themselves fully to Him. One compelling reason for this was to rid the Israelites of all pagan influences.

They are reminded that, in the past, God's people had not always served Him. They had worshipped other gods (Joshua 24:2, 14). Now it was time to put away any notion of foreign, pagan, or strange gods and to serve Jehovah once and for all (Joshua 24:14, 23). The phrase "put away" concerning the strange gods likely indicates that they still had some of them in their possessions (or at the very least in their hearts and affections). It is entirely possible that these were household gods or idols much like those Jacob removed from his family before dwelling in Bethel (Genesis 35:1-4). These were the gods that their forefathers served in Egypt (Joshua 24:14) as well as the gods of the pagan people of the new land they now possessed (Joshua 24:15).

The strange gods of the Egyptians and the Amorites were a plethora of pagan influence and lifestyle. The Egyptian gods were primarily animals, natural objects, and a combination of these with human likeness. There were Ra, the Sun God; Hekt, the goddess of fertility represented by a female human figure with a frog's head; Osiris, the god of the lower world to whom all agricultural produce was attributed; as well as many other representations of their daily lives, including livestock. It is interesting to note that the ten plagues God enforced upon Egypt were designed to show the superiority of the one true God over their pagan deities (cf. Exodus 18:10-11). "The gods of the Amorites" mentioned in v.15 of our text probably was a reference to all Canaanite pagan deities, which would include such notables as Ashtoreth, Molech, (to whom infant sacrifices were made), and Baal. Immorality of one form or another was involved in serving all of them.

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WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED?

Hear - (Romans 10:17; Matthew 7:24-27).

Believe - (Hebrews 11:6; Mark 16:15-16).

Repent - (Acts 2:38; 17:30; Luke 13:3).

Confess - (Matthew 10:32,33; Acts 8:36).

Be baptized - (Acts 2:38; Galatians 3:27).

Live faithfully unto death - (Rev. 2:10).

The negative effects of pagan deity upon one's moral, societal, and spiritual existence is evident. But that doesn't make them any easier to resist. God's people have always struggled with strange gods and idol worship. This just goes to show how powerful of an adversary we have in Satan and how influential our neighbors can be to us. God, in handing down the Ten Commandments to His newly delivered people, made sure they understood just where He stood in regard to worshipping anyone or anything else besides Himself. The first two deal directly with having only one God and not having any created idols around (Exodus 20:1-6). In our lesson text, Joshua warned that if the Israelites continued to follow other gods the Lord would punish them (Joshua 24:20). Sadly, this happened time and time again in the centuries that followed. God's people would follow pagan deities, and God would cause them to lose battles, send them into captivity, strike the land with famine, etc.

But God's people don't have any problems with pagan deities, idols, or strange gods today, do we? Before you answer that, read the following:

The 23rd Channel

The TV is my shepherd, my spiritual life shall want,
It maketh me to sit down and do nothing for His name's sake.
It demandeth my spare time.
It restoreth my soul's desire for the things of the world. It keepeth me
from studying the truth of God's Word.
It leadeth me in the path of failure to attend God's house. Yea, though
I live to be a hundred, I will fear no rental; My "Telly" is with me, its
sound and vision comfort me.
It prepareth a program for me, even in the presence of visitors.
Its volume shall be full.
Surely comedy and commercials shall follow me all the days of my
life,
And I will dwell in spiritual poverty forever.
(Author Unknown)

Yes, without a doubt, we have a problem with "strange gods" today. If you think about it, deity worship under Old Testament times demanded time away from Jehovah, insisted upon sinful activity, and caused one to focus upon self rather than on others or God. The

strange gods of today are no different. Many things pull us away from time that should be spent with God. Many things today lure us into unrighteousness. Many things today tempt us to live for self only. Our Savior, Jesus, once said, "You cannot serve God and mammon" (Matthew 6:24) and later said, "He who is not with Me is against Me" (Matthew 12:30). If someone were to ask me how many of the members at the congregation where I preach are active, I would have to answer, "They all are!" By that I would ruefully mean that some are active for the Lord and the rest are active for the devil! At any given moment in time, we are either serving God or serving gold, following the Word or following the world. Anything that gets between us and serving God with our whole heart, soul, and mind (Matthew 22:37) has become a strange god and is jeopardizing our soul.

The people of Joshua's day had a choice to make (Joshua 24:15). They had to choose between strange gods and THE God. They had to choose between false worship and true worship. They had to choose between current indulgence of their lusts and a future of eternal bliss. Today, we must make the same decision. If we choose God, then we must know that what is demanded of us is no less than what was demanded of them.

- They were expected to incline their hearts and passions toward God (Joshua 24:23) - so are we. God is to take precedence in our affections and lives. Every thought we have and every decision we make needs to have God and His will at the center.

- They were expected to trust and obey (Joshua 24:24) - so are we. We need to have the kind of faith that trusts God implicitly. We need to trust that His instructions are good for our souls and have the hope of His promises, not the least of which is eternal life.

- They were expected to serve and worship properly (Joshua 24:14,21) - so are we. Our affections and faith should culminate in actions. And our actions should always be only those which God has approved and authorized. By the way, note the comparison of Joshua 24:14 and John 4:24. Our service needs to be "in sincerity and in truth" and our worship needs to be "in spirit and in truth." Proper service and worship is serious business to God, and it needs to be to us as well.

sins." (11:27-28). As used in this grammatical construction, the word "so" is an adverb of manner. It expresses the means or methods by which something may be achieved. Paul does not deny his thesis (see the opening paragraph of this article) by this verse as Premillennialists claim; he affirms his proposition! All of God's Israel will all be saved in precisely the same way! There is no distinction between Jew and Gentile. God's Israel consists of all who submit themselves to His righteousness as revealed in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Hence, the promised Deliverer of the Old Testament (the Lord Jesus Christ) was and is the means by which any and all can be saved. Any Jew who is saved will be saved in exactly the same manner as Paul!

PRAISE GOD FOR HIS IRREVOCABLE GIFTS AND CALLING

Had God's love been conditional, both Jew and Gentile would live in a state of eternal hopelessness. All have sinned and come short of God's glory. However, God's great love moved Him to provide a means by which Jew and Gentile could share in His calling and in His gifts — "For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable." (11:29). Had His love been conditional, who could have blamed Him for revoking His eternal plan? The Gentiles lived in open rebellion such that He gave them up (Romans 1:19-32), and the Jews were guilty of precisely the same sins (Romans 2:1-3).

Had man been in charge and been treated as our Heavenly Father was treated, I am convinced that the offer of salvation would have been withdrawn. Had a soldier pierced the side of my son, mercy would have been out of the question! However, thanks be to God, man was not in charge! "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become His counselor? Or who has first given to Him And it shall be repaid to him? For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen. (11:33-36).

The gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. The gospel of Christ ... is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek!

- Romans 9—God’s Israel is not composed of the fleshly descendents of Abraham; it is composed of all who accept God’s law of righteousness (9:6-7, 30-33).
- Romans 10—God’s law of righteousness mandates that there be no distinction between Jew and Gentile; salvation is extended to all who call upon (submit to) the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (10:12).

CHAPTER 11—A GRAND SUMMATION OF PAUL’S PREVIOUS PROOFS

Passage # 1 - “I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew.” (11:1-2b). Mark it down again — God has not cast away His people! However, as a physical nation, God did cast away Israel, or more properly Israel cast away God. Yet, Paul (an Israelite) was recognized as one of God’s people. If these premises are true, it follows that all Israel is not Israel which is exactly the same thing that Paul stated at Romans 9:6-7. God’s people, what ever that phrase means, are not and were not composed of the fleshly descendents of Abraham. If that had been the case, then what claim would the Jews have over the descendents of Esau? God’s people are not and were not determined by blood kinship! Simply stated, God’s people are composed of those who submit themselves (Jews or Gentiles) to God’s righteousness — no more and no less!!

Passage #2 - “What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it...” (11:7). Even a casual reading of this verse reveals the fact that the phrase “Israel” and “God’s elect” are not synonymous; they do not include the same group or class of people. Therefore, physical Israel in this text is not God’s elect. Rather, God’s elect are comprised of another group or class of people. Individual Israelites may be included in God’s elect, but if they are, it is not because of the fact that they are Israelites. Paul’s election is the obvious proof of that proposition!

Passage #3 — “And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: ‘The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their

How about you? If you haven’t yet, it is time to “put away the gods” in your life (i.e., that which stands between you and your total obedience and service to God). If you haven’t yet it is time for you to declare, “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”

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STRANGE FIRE

David Long

Our text for this study is Leviticus 10:1-2, “*And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the LORD, which he commanded them not And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD.*” Nadab and Abihu were priests doing their service in the tabernacle. The tabernacle had been built exactly as God had said and now Aaron and his sons were offering the sacrifices and burning the incense. In chapter nine of Leviticus Moses recorded how God had authorized every aspect of the Levitical service to be done. In verse 24 of chapter nine God sends down fire symbolizing and signifying His approval of their adherence to His law. Now in chapter ten we have trouble. Chapter ten answers the question, “What is God’s attitude toward those person’s who do not respect God’s authorized way?” Isn’t it amazing how quickly man turns away from what God has said? The word “strange” here means “to turn aside” (*Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*). God had not authorized the fire Nadab and Abihu were using. By using an unauthorized fire Nadab and Abihu had turned aside from God’s way. They were now doing it their way.

The lesson to be learned here is that we must do what God has commanded. We must have authority from the word of God. To use something or do something in worship and service to God which God has not commanded is to do that which is forbidden. In other words, if God has specified something then everything else is eliminated. For example, when Noah was given the pattern for building the Ark God specified the kind of wood to be used — gopher wood. The Bible says,

"Make thee an ark of gopher wood; rooms shalt thou make in the ark, and shalt pitch it within and without with pitch. And this is the fashion which thou shalt make it of: The length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, the breadth of it fifty cubits, and the height of it thirty cubits. A window shalt thou make to the ark, and in a cubit shalt thou finish it above; and the door of the ark shalt thou set in the side thereof; with lower, second, and third stories shalt thou make it" (Genesis 6:14-16). Was Noah at liberty to use other kinds of wood? NO! He only had authority for gopher wood. If Noah had used other kinds of wood he would have been turning aside from God's way. But Noah did "according to all that God commanded him, so did he" (Genesis 6:22). Noah did not use strange wood, he used gopher wood. This same principle applies today. We must have authority for all that we do. The Bible says, "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him" (Colossians 3:17).

Today we could say that there are those who are using strange music. Instrumental music used in worship to God is strange music because there is no authority for it. God has said what kind of music He wants. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" (Colossians 3:16). "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:19). The command in these verses is clear — sing! Where is the authority for instrumental music? To be honest with you I do not find it in these verses. But there are those who will say, "Well, they used instrumental music in the Old Testament." To be honest with you I have never understood what this proves. The argument is also made, "Well, they use or will use instrumental music in heaven." In the first place where does the Bible teach that and in the second place if they do or will - So what! What does that prove now? I am unable to find in the New Testament where the church of Christ of the first century used instruments of music in their worship. Historically we know that did not happen. I wonder why the church of the first century did not use instruments? Was it because there were not any instruments of music in the first century? NO! Was it because no one knew how to play them? NO! It was because there was no authority for them. It comes down to this: Christ never commanded mechanical music, the Holy Spirit never sanctioned it and the apostles never used it and

other than the one expressing it, it must be sustained or proven. Romans 1:16-17 contains Paul's inspired thesis of the book and the next 10 chapters contain the proof that sustains his thesis. Hear his thesis once again — "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith.'" Whatever else he says, teaches, or implies in the book does not contradict the thesis; it sustains it! Mark that truth on the wall! It will be useful later.

CHAPTERS 2 THROUGH 10—A PROGRESSION OF PROOFS

- Romans 2—God has the right to judge and His judgments are righteous (2:2-5).
- Romans 3—God's righteous intent was and is to save mankind apart from the law of Moses; salvation is through faith (3:28).
- Romans 4—God's accounting is righteous, whether of sin by the law or of righteousness through faith similar to Abraham's (4:14-22).
- Romans 5—God has decreed men of faith righteous through the blood of Jesus (5:1).
- Romans 6—God offers grace and newness of life to those who submit to His system of faith through baptism and godly living (6:3-4,17-23).
- Romans 7—God's demands of righteousness cannot be achieved by man apart from grace and the system of faith offered through the gospel (7:20-25).
- Romans 8—God's love is unconditional, but His eternal blessings are only available through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ (8:1, 31-39).

He would have been truly wise to set his affection on things above and not on things on the earth (Colossians 3:2).

In the long ago God's people were seeking, in vain, things to make them happy and give meaning to their lives. A few thousand years down the road apparently we have not learned anything. Our spending gets bigger but our giving gets smaller. We spend more hours on the job and fewer with our families. We will go to great lengths to study and learn to earn degrees, but will not so much as open a Bible and read a chapter to be saved or grow closer to the Lord. How many in the church are now bowing before the demanding god of materialism? How many sacrifice their children, not physically, but emotionally and spiritually at the altars of the gods of advancement and success? What percentage has removed the Lord from the throne of their hearts, only to replace Him with themselves? When we serve so many strange gods and seek pleasure in so many strange vanities, how strange must we look to the Lord.

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REVELATIONS FROM ROMANS

THE REVELATION OF THE IRREVOCABLE GIFTS OF GOD

(ROMANS 11).

Jim Bullington

Pardon my simplicity, but the theme calls for it. A gift is that which is given (with or without conditions); a transference of property or rights. An irrevocable gift is a gift that cannot be recalled or reclaimed by the giver; an irretrievable transfer. The book of Romans reveals God's greatest gift to man (salvation), and the fact that God will not, yea cannot, recall, retrieve or revoke His offer! That is the message of Romans, particularly Romans 11. Analyze the chapter with me by 1) Reviewing what the first 10 chapters teach, and 2) Considering three key passages from Romans 11.

THE THESIS OF THE BOOK OF ROMANS

A thesis is the expression of an idea, view or position concerning some subject matter. In order for a thesis to be accepted by persons

therefore we have no authority for it. It does not make a difference how much we may think it's better, if it is not done in God's way, how can it be better? I do not see how anyone could make God's way better. Adding an instrument to the singing does not make the singing better. If it does, it is only in our ears and not God's.

I don't know if you have ever noticed this about Leviticus 10:1-2 but with all the things that were right about it, it took only one element of wrong to displease God. Nadab and Abihu learned the hard way that God means what He says.

I am reminded of what happened to Uzzah (2 Samuel 6). David was attempting to bring back the Ark of God that the Philistines had captured. Let's pick it up in verse 3 of 2 Samuel 6: *"And they set the ark of God upon a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab that was in Gibeah: and Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, drave the new cart. And they brought it out of the house of Abinadab which was at Gibeah, accompanying the ark of God: and Ahio went before the ark. And David and all the house of Israel played before the LORD on all manner of instruments made of fir wood, even on harps, and on psalteries, and on timbrels, and on cornets, and on cymbals. And when they came to Nachon's threshingfloor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God."* Why did God kill Uzzah? Because of the same principle we have been talking about from Leviticus 10:1-2 concerning Nadab and Abihu. He did not have the authority. In the first place the Ark was not to be carried on a cart but carried by the priests (1 Chronicles 15:2) and in the second place no one could touch it *"lest they die"* (Numbers 4:15).

The lesson here ought to be clear: God's way is the best way, in fact, it is the only way? But for some reason man seems to think that he has a better way or he can improve upon God's way. The Bible says, *"By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name"* (Hebrews 13:15). God wants to hear the *"fruit of our lips."* To add an instrument to the singing is to offer something that He has not commanded. To add an instrument to the singing is to add another

kind of music. This is exactly how Nadab and Abihu got into trouble with their fire. The fire God wanted them to use apparently wasn't good enough for them so they decided to do something different. Because of their use of "strange fire", God destroyed them with fire.

Dear reader, you and I have no right to add to or take away or substitute from the word of God. We cannot go beyond what is written. The Bible says, "...that in us ye might learn not to go beyond the things which are written..." (1 Corinthians.4:6 ASV). We must do what God has said do, exactly the way He said do it and for the reasons He said do it. Are you part of a group that uses "strange music" in their worship to God? Let me encourage you to come out of that group and become a member of the church of Christ. You can be a member of the church of Christ by (1) believing (John 8:24); (2) repenting (Acts 17:30); (3) confessing (Acts 8:37); (4) and being baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38).

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"STRANGE THAT YE RUN NOT WITH THEM"

(1 Peter 4:4)
A.J. Cox

God has always demanded that His people be different from the rest of the world. Israel of old was chosen to be His peculiar people, and a peculiar treasure (Deuteronomy 14:2; 26:18; Exodus 19:5; Psalm 135:4). They were separate from among all the people of the earth (I Kings 8:53). Today, God's people are those who compose the church (I Peter 2:10). They too are God's elect, a peculiar people, a chosen generation (Titus 2:14; I Peter 1:1-2; 2:9). The church, as the Israel of God, has been called out of the darkness of the world and is admonished to be separate from it (Galatians 6:16; I Peter 2:9; II Corinthians 6:17).

Those who obey the gospel should understand that they are entering into a life that will puzzle and confuse the unregenerate masses. In keeping with man's unfortunate habit to ridicule what he does not understand, the unforgiven will torment the saints because of their

There are few things as clear and pointed in the Old Testament as God's attitude toward strange gods. The recognition or worship of them is strictly and plainly forbidden and the consequence of violating this prohibition is facing the wrath of God.

GODS ATTITUDE TOWARD STRANGE VANITIES

For most of human history man has foolishly sought happiness by acquiring things. Most people associate pleasure, joy, happiness and satisfaction with wealth or possessions. If you do not believe this is true consider the billions spent annually on lotteries and other forms of gambling. If this is not the case why did record numbers of people tune in three nights a week to find out *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire*? If the acquisition of things and money brings about more happiness, why are so many of the rich and famous addicted to drugs and alcohol and attempt suicide? By this logic they should be the happiest people alive, yet they are obviously not. This addiction to materialism is foolish because God has made clear the fact that these strange vanities cannot bring about true happiness. *"But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out And having food and raiment let us be therewith content But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows"* (I Timothy 6:6-10).

We would be wise to learn from the foolishness of Solomon. The blessings that God had given him became curses when the king trusted in them instead of the giver of them. Solomon took trips to see all there was to see (Ecclesiastes 1:14). He amassed houses, gardens, servants, foods, jewels, pets, musicians, lands, orchards and money like none before or since. In his own words, *"I was great and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem...and whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy"* (Ecclesiastes 2:1-10). What was the wise king's assessment of all he accomplished and acquired? *"Behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun... therefore I hated life...I hated all my labour"* (Ecclesiastes 2:11-18).

“And the LORD said unto Moses, Go, get thee down; for thy people, which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves: They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them: they have made them a molten calf, and have worshipped it, and have sacrificed thereunto, and said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which have brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. And the LORD said unto Moses, I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiffnecked people: Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation” (Exodus 32:7-10). Had Moses not pleaded with God to have mercy on them He would have destroyed them for their idolatry.

Despite His God-given wisdom, Solomon foolishly turned from the true God to serve many strange gods. The Lord had given him adequate warning concerning the consequences of taking strange wives. *“Ye shall not go in to them, neither shall they come in unto you: for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods”* (1 Kings 11:2). The warning of the Lord became true and now history records, *“...his wives turned away his heart. For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away his heart after other gods”* (1 Kings 11:3-4). When Solomon turned his heart from God to the idol gods of his wives, the Lord said, *“I will surely rend the kingdom from thee and will give it to thy servant”* (1 Kings 11:11).

Elijah mocked the foolishness of those who turned to gods of their own creation for comfort, strength or guidance. In issuing a challenge to the prophets of the false god Baal he intended to prove the supremacy of Jehovah over all gods. *“And call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD: and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God. And all the people answered and said, It is well spoken...and called on the name of Baal from morning even until noon, saying, O Baa!, hear us. But there was no voice, nor any that answered...it came to pass at noon, that Elijah mocked them, and said, Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awakened”* (1 Kings 18:24-27). Jehovah would then demonstrate His supreme power and have the servants of false gods put to death.

good conversation (I Peter 2:12, 19-20; 3:14, 16-17; 4:14-16). As Peter said, they will speak evil of (blaspheme) you because “they think it strange that ye run not with them” (I Peter 4:4). This raises a few questions. First, what would it mean for a saint to run with them? Second, why do saints “run not with them?” Third, why do non-Christians think that this is strange?

HOW WOULD A SAINT “RUN WITH THEM?”

When one “runs with” a group of people that person is endorsing and participating in their activities. If, therefore, Christians “run with” the unrighteous they partake in their evil deeds. This they should never do (I Timothy 5:22; II John 9-11). The list of sins in I Peter 4:3, like the list of the works of the flesh in Galatians 5:19-21, is by no means exhaustive. These sins do, however, provide a clear picture of the life of the individual who will not inherit the kingdom of God (Galatians 5:21). This kind of lifestyle, which Peter termed “the will of the Gentiles,” was characteristic of the Gentiles of that period (I Peter 4:3). Their passions were untamed and their lusts were unbridled. These sinners did not “occasionally stumble” into these vices, rather, their lives were an “excess (overflowing) of riot” (I Peter 4:4). When a child of God joins the wicked in such unrestrained indulgence they are running with the ungodly. As the dog returns to its vomit; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire, they have forfeited their salvation (II Peter 2:20-22).

WHY DO SAINTS “RUN NOT WITH THEM?”

Man is a rational, free-moral being. God has always sought to direct man’s steps by appealing to his capacity to reason. Peter, likewise, has offered some logical, common sense reasons why saints should not “run with” the ungodly.

1. Jesus suffered for us in the flesh (I Peter 4:1). When a person becomes accountable to God sin revives and that individual dies spiritually (Romans 7:9). As long as a person continues in this condition they are a servant of sin, or, sold under sin (Romans 6:20; 7:14). The alien sinner, unaided, is powerless to bring about a resolution to his sin problem. Left to himself, this hopeless soul can but cry out “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the

body of this death?” (Romans 7:24). Sinful man’s greatest need is to have a deliverer. Thank God for Jesus Christ, His unspeakable gift (Romans 7:25; 2 Corinthians 9:15). Why should the saints not run with the unrighteous? Because Jesus gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity (Titus 2:14). We have been redeemed with the precious blood of Christ (I Peter 1:18-19). If we fall away, or run with the ungodly, we crucify the Son of God afresh and put him to an open shame (Hebrews 6:6). This would be a crime unparalleled.

2. The time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles (I Peter 4:3). Every person who has transgressed has spent a sufficient amount of time serving sin. Indeed, every redeemed saint has spent too much time walking according to the course of this world in their past life as an unregenerate sinner (Ephesians 2:2). Why contribute to that which is sufficient!? The Christian has purified his soul in obeying the truth; he has been born again (I Peter 1:22-23). The old man of sin has been crucified with Christ to destroy the body of sin, that henceforth we should not serve sin (Romans 6:6). For the Saint, that sad period of time has been terminated. He should no longer live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God (1 Peter 4:2).

3. One day we will have to give account to God for the life that we have lived (I Peter 4:5-6). We must all come to understand that there are consequences to our actions. We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad (II Corinthians 5:10). On that great day of reckoning each accountable person will either be found on the right hand of the Son of man with the sheep, or on the left hand of Christ with the goats (Matthew 25:31-33). The life that you live will determine where you stand (Matthew 25:34-45). Those who run with the ungodly will go away into everlasting punishment. The righteous, who “run not with them,” will receive life eternal (Matthew 25:46). This is certainly one of God’s most convincing “reasons” that motivate us to “run not” with the wicked. Peter reminds us that while the saints may be blasphemed because of their “strange life,” it is better to be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit (I Peter 4:4-6).

because they lusted and went after strange flesh (Jude 7). The word “strange” is used in a negative way almost every time it is found in the Bible. The majority of the time the word is used negatively to describe something with which the Lord is not pleased.

In Jeremiah 8:18-22 another strange thing that is displeasing to God is condemned. In this text Jeremiah speaks about the anger of the Lord being provoked because of their use of “strange vanities” (Jeremiah 8:19). He then laments the pitiable condition of his nation and asks the question, *“Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there? Why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?”* It is clear from even a casual reading of the text that Israel’s problem was not that there was no doctor to treat them or medicine to heal them, but that they were turning to strange vanities for healing. They rejected the God of all creation for gods of their own creation. In the past they wanted a king like all the nations around them (1 Samuel 8:5,20) and now they wanted gods like all the nations around them. Jeremiah describes these things as strange vanities. The word vanities is used to describe something that is worthless, useless and empty, a fitting description of the gods they were choosing to serve and the material things in which they vainly sought happiness.

GOD’S ATTITUDE TOWARD STRANGE GODS

When giving His initial law to the Israelites, God began the Ten Commandments with stern warnings about idolatry and false gods. *“Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me”* (Exodus 20:3-5). Sadly, as God was giving this very command to Moses, the people were building and worshipping an idol god of their own creation (Exodus 32:1-6). What was God’s attitude toward their idolatry?

appear to be “open- minded”, but in reality may just make us fickle and immature. It may just mean that we do not know the difference between the “strange doctrines” of the Devil, and the true doctrine of Christ. That lack of stability makes us prime targets for those who would lead us away from the truth.

There is no doubt that as we grow in knowledge of God’s word our understanding will improve, and we will have to bring our views into line with what the Bible teaches. Only the spiritually dishonest will refuse to change when the Bible corrects them. But not everything is “up for grabs”. There are some settled things to which we must cling with complete tenacity. It is not a sign of “open-mindedness” and “honest skepticism” to never be sure of anything. Certain principles have been established beyond question, and we must stand on and build on those. “Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, And of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this will we do, if God permit” (Hebrews 6:1-3). We must not be carried about with “strange doctrines”, but “stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught” (2 Thessalonians 2:15).

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STRANGE VANITIES

Jeremiah 8:19
Brandon Britton

Generally speaking, when the word “strange” is used in the Bible it is referring to something that is unauthorized by God or foreign to His people. Jacob commanded those of his household to put away strange gods (Genesis 35:2). Nadab and Abihu were struck dead because they offered strange fire (Leviticus 10:1-2). Solomon was guilty of loving many strange women and having many strange wives that turned his heart from the Lord (1 Kings 11:1,8). Israel dealt treacherously with the Lord by having many strange children (Hosea 5:7). We are warned of being carried about with many strange doctrines (Hebrews 13:9). Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed

WHY DO THE WICKED THINK IT IS STRANGE THAT WE RUN NOT WITH THEM?

The child of God must remember that the alien sinner is dead in trespasses and sins. The unregenerate are walking according to the prince of the power of the air, and are fulfilling the lusts of the flesh and the desires of the mind. They are *by nature* (by long standing practice, or habit) the children of wrath (Ephesians 2:1-3). These poor, pitiable souls do not view the conduct described in I Peter 4:3 as objectionable. Thus, they look with astonishment upon the refusal of Christians to participate with them. For the most part, their philosophy of life is “let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die” (I Corinthians 15:32). It should come as no surprise to the saint for their manner of life to be viewed as strange or peculiar by the unrighteous.

Children of God must prepare themselves to suffer persecution and ridicule at the hands of the wicked (II Timothy 3:12; I Peter 4:4, 12-13). This can be done by arming ourselves with the mind of Christ (Philippians 2:5-8; I Peter 4:1). His purpose was to do the will of the Father (Matthew 26:39, John 4:34). He was supremely confident in the righteousness of His cause and committed himself to the righteous judgment of the Father (Hebrews 12:2; I Peter 2:23). We can also take comfort in the fact that while the unrighteous may demand an explanation for our strange conduct in this life, one day the tables will be turned and they will be made to give account for their strange conduct before God.

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STRANGE THINGS

Patrick Morrison

Jesus often amazed and astonished those of the first century by both word and deed. Numerous times in the Gospel accounts, we find the audiences astounded at some great teaching of the Christ or one of the many miracles he performed. The miracles he performed garnered much attention, amazing those who saw them (see Matthew 15:31; Mark 4:41; 7:37; Luke 4:36). However, these were not done in an attempt merely to bring attention upon himself. Jesus performed these deeds so that some might come to believe the word he spoke. The miracles gave credence to the message he brought to the masses. Those who listened to his teachings had never heard anything like it. From a very early age he bewildered the religious leaders and the common people of his day with his superior teaching (Luke 2:48). At the conclusion of his lengthiest, and perhaps greatest discourse—the Sermon on the Mount—the Bible records that “the people were astonished at his doctrine: for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes” (Matthew 7:28,29). Those who were attentive to his message “marveled” (Matthew 22:22) and were “astonished” (22:33). Even Christ’s closest companions could do nothing but marvel at his teachings (Mark 10:24). At times, it was a combination of both word and deed that left the huddled masses buzzing (Matthew 13:54). There has never been, nor will there ever be a teacher who could captivate an audience as did the Lord Jesus Christ.

On one occasion Jesus healed a man who was bedridden with palsy. Before he commanded the man to rise up and walk, he first pronounced this man’s sins forgiven (Luke 5:20-24). The man rose up immediately, walking to his home (vs.25). Those gathered on this day who witnessed this event summed it up by saying, “We have seen strange things today” (vs.26). The teachings and deeds of Jesus were indeed strange. They were/are strange in that they were out of the ordinary. Jesus would often introduce his teachings, “Ye have heard it said...but I say unto you.” These teachings of the Lord were strange in the sense of newness. The miracles he performed superseded the laws of nature and were truly supernatural and extraordinary. The teachings and deeds of Jesus were also strange in the sense that they did not fit the preconceived ideas of many people. Many of his

what God teaches in the Bible, then it is a “strange doctrine”. Since Jesus Christ is the “same yesterday, today, and tomorrow”, his teaching also is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. The ideas of men may be ever-changing, but not so the teachings of Christ. Men’s theories must change as their knowledge increases. Newly discovered facts mean they have misunderstood what they have been teaching. The only honest thing to do is to modify their teachings to bring them into line with their new understanding. But Jesus never needs to modify his teachings. His understanding of everything is complete, and so his doctrine never need fine-tuned. He would send his apostles the Holy Spirit to “teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (John 14:26). The Holy Spirit would guide them into all truth (John 16:13). That which was written would never need to be modified or corrected. God would provide them “all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue” (2 Peter 1:3). Therefore we can be confidently assured that what we read in the Bible is absolutely right, and cannot be wrong. It also means that what we find somewhere else is not right, and is not part of “all truth”. We must reject what we do not read in the Bible, and confidently cling to that which we do. Since we can rely on Jesus to be the same yesterday, today, and forever, we know what he teaches is the same yesterday, today, and forever. We must hold to that and not be “carried about with divers and strange doctrines” (Hebrews 13:9).

It is through the doctrine of God that we mature and grow in our Christian faith. “Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ” (Ephesians 4:13-15). When we reach the “knowledge of the Son of God” and attain the adulthood of the Christian faith, having grown up in him, we can stand solidly on the doctrine he teaches. We “are no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine”. Those who have grown in the “grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18) will stand firm and be established in the doctrines of Christ. Constantly wavering and changing our beliefs may

STRANGE DOCTRINES

Phil Grear

The constantly changing and uncertain times in which we live can be very disconcerting. They can leave us wondering if there is anything about which we can be certain. A Christian lady once said she appreciated the certainty of God's church. Everything in her life right then was in a turmoil. Her husband was changing jobs. Her own job was uncertain. Her kids were reaching those teenage years. She had recently lost her mother. It seemed that everything in her life was in a state of flux. The one thing she could count on was knowing that things would be the same when she went to worship on Sunday. She counted on the church to be an anchor while her life was floundering in a sea of change.

It is a joy to know that there are things that are like the north point on the compass that enables us to keep our bearings. "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and for ever. Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines. (Hebrews 13:8-9) Jesus' teachings (doctrine) are fixed permanently, and we can depend on that.

With so many different ideas in the world it is difficult to know what to believe and what to reject. You can find an almost infinite variety of ideas and teachings on about any subject. And while some would argue it is good to have such choices, in reality truth is narrow. So what that variety means is that we can choose between various lies and false ideas. However, we are not to be "carried about with divers and strange doctrines." "Divers" means various, and there are thousands of various and varying "doctrines of devils" (1 Timothy 4:1). Satan does not care which lie we believe, any of them will allow him to destroy us. He is only concerned that we do not believe and obey the one "doctrine of Christ". "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son" (2 John 9).

The phrase "strange doctrines" involves the idea of "foreign doctrines". A "strange doctrine" is one that is foreign to the teachings of God. It may sound good. It may come from a highly respected source. It maybe propounded by some "expert", but if it differs from

teachings were difficult to accept, and so some could dismiss this by convincing themselves that his teachings were strange. The religious leaders of Jesus' day had a misconstrued idea of the mission of the Messiah. They were under the impression that this Messiah would deliver Israel from Roman oppression, and would sanction the traditions of the elders. His teaching and his actions defied both of these false notions, and for this reason the religious leaders of Christ's day refused to hear his message of salvation. Because his teachings were so unorthodox, and because his message and his actions were not in harmony with the tradition of the elders, the religious leaders dismissed Jesus as a lunatic and a blasphemer. Thinking he was a lunatic, the religious leaders tried to ignore the Christ. However, when Jesus began to draw the masses by virtue of his message and miracles, the religious leaders saw him as a threat to their way of living. Classifying him now as a blasphemer, the Sadducees and Pharisees now had justification for eliminating this lunatic known as Jesus of Nazareth.

Could it be that we too see strange things when we read about the miracles and study the message of Christ? It could be that these seem strange to us because we do not spend time studying the word of God as we should. A lack of knowledge of God's revealed will is a serious plague in our land. So many are following their own way in matters religious instead of allowing God to direct their paths through His word (Jeremiah 10:23). Far too many are enslaved to sin because they have not been set free by the word of God (John 8:24). The gospel message, the good news about salvation, is God's power to save (Romans 1:16). Therefore, men must hear and study this message if they will come to have a faith that will lead them to the Lord (Romans 10:13-17). By studying and obeying this message one's soul will be made pure (1 Peter 1:22). The good news stored up in our hearts will keep us from sin (Psalm 119:11). One who will be truly happy is the person who will meditate upon the word of God day and night (Psalm 1:2). In our land there is a famine of the word of God (Amos 8:11), not because God has taken His word from us, but because so many are unwilling to read and study it. This problem is not limited to those who are amoral, or those who are not religious. Spiritual ignorance, unfortunately, is a great problem even among God's own people. A lack of knowledge of the word of God led to the downfall of Israel (Hosea 4:6), and it is doing the same to spiritual (Continued on page 15)

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Israel (the church, Galatians 6:16) today. Too many Christians fit the description given by God through Jeremiah: "My people is foolish, they have not known me; they are sottish children, and they have none understanding: they are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge" (Jeremiah 4:22). Indeed, the teachings and actions of Christ are strange to so many because of ignorance of God's word.

It could be that the teachings of Christ seem so strange because they do not fit our own preconceived ideas. It is detrimental to the well-being of our souls to approach the Bible with the idea that we are going to prove what we think is right and reject anything that would conflict with our thinking. How many come to the Bible with the idea that faith only saves, picking and choosing passages that they feel supports this premise, while rejecting any that would contradict their idea (such as James 2:24)? How many are influenced to believe that denominationalism is divinely sanctioned, or at least tolerated by God, and will refuse to see that there is only one church that enjoys divine authorization (Ephesians 4:4), the one and only one church that Christ will save (Ephesians 5:23)? When one approaches the Scriptures in this way, he exhibits an attitude identical to that of the religious leaders of Christ's day. His teachings did not fit their thinking, so they simply dismissed him with the wave of a hand. Jesus condemned the self-righteous religious leaders for this attitude (John 5:37-40). In order to be pleasing to God, we must approach a study of the Bible with the attitude that whatever it says, that we will do. We must allow our lives to be shaped by the word of God rather than trying to make the word of God conform to our thinking. To many, the teachings of Christ are strange because they conflict with strongly held opinions which many are unwilling to give up.

Are the teachings and deeds of Christ strange to you? Is it because the word of God is unfamiliar to you due to a lack of study? Is it strange to you because it does not fit your preconceived notions? Resolve now to remedy this problem by studying the word of God fervently. Approach this study with the attitude that you will follow the will of God without reservation and without pretense. To do so will lead to the salvation of your soul, and eternal bliss in the life to come.