

EQUIPPING THE SAINTS

"...FOR THE EQUIPPING OF THE SAINTS FOR THE WORK OF SERVICE..." ~ EPHESIANS 4:12

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CHRISTIANITY IN A CORNER?

By Andrew Dow

Near the end of the book of Acts, we read about Paul being falsely accused, imprisoned, and placed on trial numerous times in a span of about two years. On one occasion Paul had an opportunity to state his case before two Roman officials, Festus and Agrippa. Paul told them how Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus (Acts 26:12-15) and commissioned him to preach the gospel to gentiles (Acts 26:16-18). Paul plainly told them, **"I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision"** (Acts 26:19).

"Paul, you are out of your mind!" Festus accused, **"Your great learning is driving you mad."** (Acts 26:24). After assuring the politician that he was sane, Paul made an important point about the gospel he was defending: **"this has not been done in a corner"** (Acts 26:26).

The events of the gospel, Paul explained, were performed in the open where anyone could observe, cross-check, and verify their validity or falsehood. This is unique among world religions that are based on historical events.

For instance, consider the beginning of Mormonism. In 1820, at the age of 14, Joseph Smith supposedly received his first heavenly vision. A few years later he was instructed in a private vision to go to a private place where he would find gold plates inscribed with an unknown language. He then dictated the translation of those plates to two scribes

before returning the plates to an angel. These plates are nowhere to be found today. This is a very veiled process that cannot be verified historically.

Take as another example the Islamic faith. In 610 AD, Muhammed, the revered muslim prophet, is said to have been meditating in a cave when Gabriel (the angel) appeared to him and revealed the message of the Qur'an. The fact that he was alone for this revelation makes it impossible to verify that the claim is true.

Now consider again the words of Paul: **“this [the gospel] has not been done in a corner”** (Acts 26:26). The beginning of Christianity was incredibly public. Jesus taught enormous crowds of people before being paraded around Jerusalem and dying a very public death (see Matt. 27; Mark 15; Luke 23; John 19). He was, perhaps surprisingly, buried in the brand new, prominent tomb of a wealthy disciple (Matt. 27:57-60). Three days later, the tomb was found empty and Jesus appeared to multiple people on multiple occasions. On at least one occasion he appeared to **“more than five hundred brethren”** (1 Cor. 15:6). The events that lead people to follow Christ were not done in a corner, but out in the open for all to see and verify for themselves.

In fact, this is Paul's point in 1 Corinthians 15, **“I delivered to you... what I also received, that Christ died for our sins... and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day... and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now”** (vs. 3-6). If you don't believe me, Paul says, go talk to the eyewitnesses! If Paul and others were lying, the gospel would have been quickly snuffed out.

PUNISHING THE WRONG PEOPLE: “NOT GOOD”

By Warren E. Berkley

“To impose a fine on a righteous man is not good, nor to strike the noble for their uprightness” (Prov. 17:26).

There is a sense of justice or fairness we develop from an early age. I see this when my grandchildren stay with us. We recently had seven spending several nights at our house. It is an exercise in little-people management I am ill-qualified for and can only endure a few days. But I always learn something if I pay attention. All of these little children (one with particular vigor) have an inner sense of fairness that causes them to sound off when they believe the adults have not dealt fairly. Usually, this signal goes off when the spokesman for justice believes he or she has been treated unfairly, or is not getting exactly what the others are getting (almost to the point of measuring and weighing the pancakes!). While this sense of justice is not fully developed at these ages, it is unwise for adults to dismiss it. In fact, we want our children to learn fairness and we entertain the highest hope, it will develop in a direction that is virtuous, unselfish and godly.

Throughout the Bible fairness, equality or justice is upheld. There is no guarantee that everybody on the earth will be treated equally, but the ideal is upheld and we are called to be people who encourage and promote justice to the best of our ability.

Terrible inequities are reported in the Bible, but never celebrated. God is perfectly fair, and He expects His people to think, speak and act from a heart that respects Him and seeks to be like Him.

To take this sense of justice into your personal practice: (1) before you react negatively to someone

(spouse, child, parent, neighbor, friend, etc.) be certain there is evidence that requires the negative reaction. **“Whoever retrains his words has knowledge, and he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding”** (Prov. 17:27). And remember, **“if one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame”** (Prov. 18:13).

(2) Get in the habit of praising good behavior; this will help you conquer any spirit of being impulsively or overly critical (quick on the draw). Love **“rejoices in the truth,”** and clings to what is good (1 Cor. 13:6, Rom. 12:9). Where praise is deserved, do not hold back or remain silent. Generous encouragement sincerely given to good people will help them maintain their goodness, and will nurture your spirit against the harsh, critical, negative thoughts that accomplish nothing.

Part of our character development must be that in finding the knowledge of God, we also **“understand righteousness and justice, equity and every good path,”** (Prov. 2:9). To punish good people is wrong. Let’s pray and study to avoid that. *[Expository Files 17.2; Feb. 2010]*

NOTES: _____

AM LESSON: The Big Switch	PM LESSON: The Book of Revelation
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“GO THEREFORE AND MAKE DISCIPLES...”
(MATTHEW 28:19-20)