

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:16)

Lesser Discussed Sins: Empty Words and Promises

by: Justin Brewer

Throughout the New Testament, the concept of “empty words” is prevalent, which is often tied to other important concepts as well. For example, deceitfulness, false prophecies/teachings, and the degradation of grace are intimately tied to “empty words” in a number of passages. How often do we consider the very act of presenting empty words as being sinful? Consider, in Matthew 18:6 Jesus said that “whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea.” Jesus used rather blunt wording to clarify the fact that misleading God’s children is indeed sinful. To build on this concept, the Apostle Paul wrote the following in Ephesians 5:6: “Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things [the sins previously discussed] the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.” This statement follows a brief list

of sins in Ephesians 5:3-5 and it accentuates at least two very important points; first, someone will come with such empty words and will promise that sin will have no eternal consequence, and second, that God will not allow such empty promises to go unpunished. Paul specifically noted that those who leveraged empty words would be punished and warned the Ephesians (and thereby modern Christians as well) not to be “partakers with them” (Ephesians 5:7). What is the Apostle Paul referring to? Was Paul referring to partaking in the sins listed or is he referring to partaking in their punishment? From the context, it is clear that Paul was warning us so that we can avoid being partakers in their punishment.

While there are multiple passages in the New Testament that deal with the concept of empty words and promises, there are two that specifically stand out: the entire letter of Jude and 2 Peter 2:1-22,

both of which establish not only the threat to Christians due to empty words, but also the deluded reality of those who perpetuate such myths, lies, and emptiness. Neither Peter nor Jude were subtle in their description of such idle ramblings; Jude wrote that “certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Jude 4). Further, Jude described such idle talkers as mouthing “great swelling words, flattering people to gain advantage” (Jude 16). Likewise, Peter wrote that “when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error” (2 Peter 2:18). The challenge that was issued in a not-so-subtle manner by both Jude and Peter was to find any depth at all to the words of such individuals, which was supported by an examination of the lives of such people in the context of these warnings.

What were the empty promises that both Jude and Peter were discussing? Both inspired writers spoke of empty promises made by such deviant individuals that are lewd by nature; their promises lead not to faithfulness and righteousness, but rather to sin. Too often today, individuals claim to be enlightened and that they have discovered something “new” in the Scriptures; with every such instance, these individuals have amazingly discovered something that allows them to continue in their sins. God, in His infinite wisdom, addressed this long ago; Peter wrote that “While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption” (2 Peter 2:19). Such individuals purport that sin will not condemn us and that we are therefore at liberty to do as we please; does this not fit exactly what Peter wrote about? Does such a perspective not degrade the grace of God, which is a wonderful thing? Note again that Jude wrote, “... who turn the grace of our God into lewdness” (Jude 4). While such individuals carefully conceal their true meaning in flattering words, their doctrine is one that will lead us away from God if we follow it.

How might we determine whether a message is truth or if it is one of “great swelling words” that are intended to flatter us? While there is not necessarily a list, both inspired writers include the same basic premise: look at the lives of those who bring the message. Further, we should be wary of one who claims to have discovered something “new” in the Scriptures that nobody in the last 2,000 years has been able to discover; is that not a rather arrogant claim to make? Further, both Jude and Peter accentuated that such people have a disregard for authority; this is often what we see today. An individual rejects the authority of the Bible in favor of his own feelings, which leads him to the “discovery” that he can do as he pleases in this life and that God’s grace will “cover” his sin. Jude wrote that “these dreamers defile the flesh, reject authority, and

speak evil of dignitaries” (Jude 8), which he followed up by discussing specific instances of rebellion (Jude 9-11). Likewise, Peter wrote that “these, like natural brute beasts made to be caught and destroyed, speak evil of the things they do not understand, and will utterly perish in their own corruption” (2 Peter 2:12). From these inspired writings, it is clear that we should immediately be wary of those who reject the authority of Scriptures while simultaneously claiming to have been enlightened to the point that they can sin without consequence.

Another step in determining the veracity of such people’s message is whether or not they grumble and complain (Jude 16). Was Jude speaking of generalized grumbling and complaining? From the context, Jude was clearly referring to their grumbling and complaining about what God has required of them; do they grumble and complain because of some command of God? Do they grumble and complain about having to give up certain sins in order to be saved? Further, do they mock (Jude 18)? Again, Jude was not referring to merely mocking the concept of God (although this would certainly be included), but rather that such individuals mock God through the manner by which they live their lives.

Essentially, both Jude and Peter state that the lives of such individuals will expose their true agenda. They are irreverent in their attitudes towards authority (Jude 8-11; 2 Peter 2:10-12), their words lack depth of meaning (Jude 12-13; 2 Peter 2:18-19), they grumble, complain, and mock God (Jude 16, 18), and their lifestyle reveals their carnal, sensual, lewd nature (2 Peter 2:13-17; Jude 12-13, 16-19). If either an individual or a group seeks to convince you that God does not care what activities you engage in and that we can live as we please and still be saved, then they fit these descriptions perfectly.

Finally, how do such individuals view sin itself? Do they view ceasing to sin as a sacrifice or do they view it as something to escape? Jude referred to saving others from sin in this manner: “...but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh” (Jude 23). Further, Peter wrote that sin is disgusting and should turn our stomachs; in 2 Peter 2:22, we read that “it happened to them according to the true proverb: ‘A dog returns to his own vomit,’ and, ‘a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire.’” Do these individuals seek to paint sin as glorious or as something to be disgusted by? Therefore, we should conclude with the following Scripture: “You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen” (2 Peter 3:17-18).

Presuming Too Much

by: Kris Brewer

There is an interesting passage that is found in the middle of the giving of the Old Law in Leviticus 24, in which a situation arose prior to God giving specific instruction on how to handle it (Leviticus 24:10-23). A young man, who was the son of an Egyptian man and an Israelite woman, blasphemed the name of the Lord and cursed in the midst of a fight with another man. The people, because of what had already been revealed, knew that what the young man did was wrong, but they did not know how to deal with the transgression. They chose to incarcerate the man and wait for the Lord to declare His will on the matter:

But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.” (Matthew 12:36-37)

Then they put him in custody, that the mind of the LORD might be shown to them. (Leviticus 24:12)

Moses was intent on waiting on the Lord to reveal His mind in the matter. He was not presumptuous, determining that he could know what God wanted without God proclaiming His mind! God gave Moses specific instructions as to how this young man was to be dealt with, and the outcome was certainly not pleasant for him. God determined that this man was to be taken out of the camp, have the witnesses to his crime lay their hands on him, and then have him

stoned by the whole congregation. This was declared to be the consequence for all who would commit the same transgression against the Lord.

There is much to be learned from this account. Certainly, one lesson we could take away from it is how seriously God takes sin in general, but specifically the cursing of His name. This has become a flippant act in our society, and even those who claim to be religious think nothing of taking the Lord's name in vain, thus cursing Him, and blaspheming. Learning to control the tongue is a difficult endeavor (James 3:1-12). However, we have the obligation of honoring God with our lips, and refraining from the blasphemous profanity that is so prevalent in our society! Jesus Himself said that we will be judged by the words that come from our lips (Matthew 12:36-37).

The lesson on which we want to focus with this article is that we cannot act presumptuously when it comes to the will of God. There is an attitude that is prevalent in the religious world today that declares that God will, and even must, accept anything that is done “for Him.” Most have no desire to actually turn to scripture to see what God has revealed, but rather act according to their own desires. If they approve of some practice, they are convinced that God must approve of it as well. We end up with any number of practices that are performed “in the name of the Lord,” but which are nothing like what the Lord has actually asked for. Jesus said there would be many who proclaimed they were doing their works in His name but that they were not going to be accepted:

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’ (Matthew 7:21–23)

There is another account in the book of Leviticus that records the actions of men who chose to be presumptuous before the Lord. In chapter 10, Nadab and Abihu were offering some of the very first offerings under the newly appointed priesthood. They made the choice to ignore the instructions they were given, and offered “profane fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded them” (Leviticus 10:1). Nadab and Abihu had only presumed to use a different fire than what God had instructed! Surely, fire is fire! Surely God would not mind if they chose to give something different than what He had revealed! But, God did mind. God responded with immediate judgment on those men for their transgression.

What we see in both of these passages is that God reveals His mind concerning how He wants things to be done. Moses, and the people of Leviticus 24, were willing to wait on His mind to be revealed so that they could act in accordance with His will. Nadab and Abihu chose to act outside of the revealed mind of God, and were immediately condemned for their presumptuousness.

Study Opportunities

Sunday Bible Study: 10:00 AM
Sunday Worship Assembly: 11:00 AM

Meeting At

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Everyone Welcome!

tuous actions.

God has revealed His mind for mankind today. He has given everything we need for “life and godliness” in that revealed message (1 Peter 1:2-4). Paul, in Ephesians chapter 3, specified the process that God chose to reveal His mind to all of mankind. He said that God sent the Holy Spirit to reveal the things that were in His mind to the apostles and prophets. They wrote down the message that was delivered to them, and through that written word those who read can understand the mystery of Christ. This is the message of the gospel (Ephesians 3:1-7)!

We should be satisfied with what God has revealed for us. He has revealed His mind, and He has given us all things that pertain to life and godliness. We should not presume to add to what God has revealed with our own desires and practices. God has revealed the things that He wants us to do! If I choose to go beyond what God has asked for, I am being presumptuous. I am inserting my own selfish desires, and declaring that God must accept my offering. The problem is, we cannot force God to accept the things we want. He has told us what He will accept, and my desires will not change His instructions.

When we presume to do something that God has not asked for, we cannot be pleasing to Him. Our every goal, our every desire should be to please the Lord. We can only do that by being selfless and submitting to His revealed word. If we go beyond that, we are being selfish, not selfless!

Do Miracles Occur Every Day?

by: Leon Mauldin

What does the Bible teach regarding miracles? Is it true, as some claim, that miracles are happening every day?

In reality, even during Bible times, miracles did not occur “every day.” Miraculous activities for the most part were confined to certain periods of Biblical history. These included the miracles of the creation week. Then when Israel was in Egyptian bondage, God sent the ten plagues, caused Israel to cross the Red Sea on dry land, fed them with manna, and on occasion also miraculously gave them water. Later,

the ministries of the prophets Elijah and Elisha were characterized by numerous miracles.

The next “cluster” of miracles was during the ministry of Christ, and finally, during the establishment and spread of the church (Acts). Obviously then, miracles were not “evenly distributed” over the centuries of Biblical history, but rather were used by God only at certain times, to meet unique needs, and to accomplish specific purposes.

Among the many miracles Jesus performed we read of His healing the man with an amputated ear by simply touching him (Luke 22:50-51). Honestly, do you see that every day, or any day? When there was a great tempest in the sea of Galilee, Jesus “rebuked the waves and the sea and there was a great calm” (Matthew 8:23-26). On another occasion, on that same sea, Jesus came unto His disciples walking on the water (Matthew 14:26). Jesus miraculously fed 5,000 men plus women and children with five loaves and two fish (Matthew 15:32-39). There are three recorded occasions where Jesus raised the dead. These include the only son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-17), Jarius’ daughter (Matthew 9:18-26), and Lazarus (John 11).

These are but a few, a very few of the miracles Jesus did. The purpose of Jesus’ miracles is stated in John 20:30-31: “And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.” That purpose has been accomplished.

Further, Mark gives us insight into the purpose of the miraculous when he writes, “And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs” (Mark 16:20). Reference is made to the salvation which began to be spoken by the Lord, “and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His will” (Hebrews 2:3,4).

The purpose of the miraculous then was to reveal and to confirm the word of God. There was a time limitation on the miraculous. Gifts such as tongues, prophecy and knowledge (miraculous) would cease (1 Corinthians 13:8-10) with the completion of the revelation. God’s power has not ceased. His presence and glory are evident all around us. We are abundantly blessed by Him (Acts 14:17; James 1:17). He hears and answers prayer (James 5:16). When the revelation of truth was completed, and had been fully confirmed, the miraculous ceased, having accomplished its purpose.

Daily Bible Reading

June 2018

June 1	Zephaniah 2	June 18	Zechariah 8
June 4	Zephaniah 3	June 19	Zechariah 9
June 5	Haggai 1	June 20	Zechariah 10
June 6	Haggai 2	June 21	Zechariah 11
June 7	Zechariah 1	June 22	Zechariah 12
June 8	Zechariah 2	June 25	Zechariah 13
June 11	Zechariah 3	June 26	Zechariah 14
June 12	Zechariah 4	June 27	Malachi 1
June 13	Zechariah 5	June 28	Malachi 2
June 14	Zechariah 6	June 29	Malachi 3-4
June 15	Zechariah 7		

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