

SATAN, THE SCAMMER!

By Richard Dent

For all accountable adults, there exist two households upon earth. One belongs to Jesus Christ and the other belongs to Satan. Those who do the will of God belong to His household, but those who obey Satan belong to his. But who would dare “obey” Satan? In a very real way, those who refuse to obey God are obeying Satan. When a person knows what God expects of him but chooses rather to ignore such instructions, he is actually choosing to follow Jesus’ adversary. The Bible often emphasizes this fact.

When Eve chose to rebel against God’s clear instructions regarding the famous tree, whom did she choose to follow? When Judas made the decision to betray his Lord, who was behind that decision? John 13:27 tells us that Satan actually “entered” into Judas. But what does this mean? Obviously,

Satan found a quick entrance into this man’s corrupt heart and took full advantage of it. When Ananias and his wife Sapphira chose to lie to the church, who do you suppose was behind this evil decision? Acts 5:3 tells us that Peter told Ananias that it was Satan who had “filled his heart to lie to the Holy Spirit.” When Simon the sorcerer offered money to the apostles in an attempt to purchase the ability to give the Holy Spirit to others, Peter said to him: “Your money perish with you, because you have thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money . . . your heart is not right in the sight of God, for I perceive that you are in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.” In other words, he was under the influence of the dark side. When Jesus said to Peter, “get behind me Satan,” it seems obvious

that He knew who was influencing Peter’s words (Matthew 16:23).

It is easy for a person to know which household he belongs to simply by observing whom he chooses to follow. All faithful Christians are heirs with Christ. His riches become our riches and His joy becomes our joy. In the same manner, His character should become our character. But to follow Satan is to develop his characteristics. To secure eternal life we must remain faithful to the Lord. Those who reject eternal life are choosing to remain faithful to Satan. The promise of eternal hope belongs only to those who make the personal choice to remain faithful members of Jesus’ household. To those who make this wise choice, the death of the physical body is merely the beginning of life eternal.

— Tulsa, OK

ALWAYS HAVE TO PLAY “SECOND FIDDLE”

by Danny Tunnell

Buck Owens wrote these lines: “Why can’t I be a leader, and play a leading part, why must I always have to play second fiddle in your heart? Play fiddle play, will there never come a day, when I don’t have to play the part of second fiddle in your heart?” We can almost hear the lament in the singer’s voice. But it’s not always a bad thing to be viewed as less important than someone else.

Most people don’t know a lot about Timothy in the Bible. He gained his reputation by helping the Apostle Paul. He was a number two guy. Usually, the number one guy gets all the attention. We hear a lot about Moses, but we don’t hear a lot about Joshua; David, but not a lot about his mighty men or Jonathan; Elijah, but not as much about Elisha; Paul, but not as much about Timothy. Don’t ever underestimate the importance of people who are not the senior leader, but are helpers of the leader.

God wants to use us whether we’re in the pulpit or out of the pulpit. It has been said, “99% of the body of Christ will never preach a sermon from a pulpit.” But they make an eternal impact by how they serve others.

There are four things that always happen when God calls a leader. First,

He raises up a leader. Someone has said, “God so loved the world that He didn’t send a committee.” God does not start with a team; He starts with a leader. Think about the Old Testament. God started with Noah. He started with Abraham, with Moses, and David, and Nehemiah, and Deborah; with Esther, with Gideon. God always starts with a leader.

The second thing that would always happen is that God would give the leader an assignment. When He called Noah, He assigned him to build an ark (Genesis 6:14). He assigned Abraham to leave his country and go to a different country (Genesis 12:1). He told Moses, “Go to Egypt and tell Pharaoh, ‘Let My people go.’” (Exodus 9:1). God assigned Nehemiah to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem (Nehemiah 4:6).

The third thing that happens - the leader panics! We see it all the time in Scripture. What did Moses say when God called him? “I don’t speak well. They won’t believe me” (Exodus 4:1,10). How did Gideon respond to God’s assignment? “I come from the puniest tribe, and the most insignificant family, and I’m the least in my family” (Judges 6:15). Sarah laughed and said, “I’m too old to have a son” (Genesis

18:12). Jeremiah said, “I’m too young to be a prophet” (Jeremiah 1:6). Everybody has an excuse. Everybody thinks, “God wants to use someone else.”

Do you know the one person God cannot use? The person who thinks God is calling him, and thinks to himself: “God is so brilliant! Because I am more talented, more skilled, and more intelligent than anyone else.” God will never use that person. “God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble” (James 4:6,10). Someone wisely said, “God will send no one away empty, except the person who is full of himself.”

(1) God raises up a leader. (2) He gives the leader an assignment. (3) The leader panics. (4) God answers, “I will be with you” (Matthew 28:20). God never expects anyone to act on his own strength. God knew David had a friend in Jonathan and a team of mighty men.

Many of us have played team sports. Almost none of us was the superstar. Did you know that having an assist in basketball is just as important as scoring the basket? Those playing “second fiddle” are not in the spotlight, but their role is important.

— Miami, OK

Old Paths

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“ask for the old paths” (Jer. 6:16)

Who Will Stand in the Gap?

by Joe Slater

Ancient cities relied on fortified walls for security. Unlike brick walls on modern houses, these walls were scores of feet high and thick enough for residences to be located within them.

Punching through such a wall required siege engines, battering rams, and a great deal of time! But once a gap (breach) was made, enemy troops could pour into the city. Defenders needed to stand in the gap to prevent such a calamity and repair the breach. Such work endangered one’s life, but an open breach spelled the end of the city.

God’s word likens the wickedness of His people to a gap in the wall. “Therefore this iniquity shall be to you like a breach (gap) ready to fall, a bulge in a high wall, whose breaking comes suddenly in an instant” (Isaiah 30:9). God would send enemy nations to chasten them, endangering their physical wellbeing. But of greater concern, was their spiritual, eternal condition. Therefore, He sought faithful people to stand in the gap, promoting righteousness by example and by teaching. Tragically, “I sought for a man . . . who would . . . stand in the gap before Me for the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one” (Ezekiel 22:30).

Where are the men and women of God today who will stand in the gap? We have a morality gap where good and evil are reversed. We have a doctrine gap where the word of God is sacrificed on the altar of cultural change. We have an integrity gap where professing Christians, especially religious leaders, are fleecing the sheep rather than feeding them, often being caught up in criminal activity and sexual misconduct.

Indeed, where are the men and women of God today who will stand in the gap?

Will you?

— Justin, TX

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 15:58). “Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer . . . Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Revelation 2:10).

STAYING CENTERED

By Charles Goodnight

Centered? Do what? Centered in what? Centered on what? What are we focused on? Where is our heart? Really? Our kids, when they were young, were diagnosed with ADHD. They had a difficult time focusing on anything. My, was that a challenge! Church, when we come together as a family to worship, what do we focus on?

What are our hearts and minds centered on?

The question applies to every day and every moment of our lives.

May our God help us to remember that Jesus Christ **MUST** be the center of our faith. The storms will come. The trials will face us. Clinging close to Jesus, we will be safe, protected, shielded from the storms of life. But even so, we will still be challenged, stretched, wrung out.

By staying focused on Jesus, we will be anchored in Him, secure and unshaken. Race car drivers are trained to focus their attention on where they want to go (as opposed to where they don’t want to go). The premise is simple: They are traveling so fast that if something catches their attention, and they look at it, they’ll hit it! So they learn to tune out the peripheral and focus on the road ahead.

Friend, focusing on Jesus will always keep us moving in the right direction. With little or no attention to the peripheral, I press on ahead - my attention on Jesus. If not, I can’t follow where He is going - I’m less in tune with Him.

May our heartbeat be in tune with His heartbeat.

Let’s just keep it simple, and let’s keep **CENTERED**. It’s the greatest of challenges.

— Texas City, TX

“Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind . . .” (Philippians 3:12-15a). “Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2).

CONCERNING
INSTRUMENTS IN
WORSHIP

By Bobby Key

A preacher of some renown was asked, “May a church use a piano in its worship service and be pleasing to the Lord?” He replied, “I do not know; it would depend on the feeling of the majority of the members and the decision of the elders.”

This answer is completely out of harmony with the doctrine of the New Covenant. Enoch had this testimony that he pleased God (Hebrews 11:5). This man walked with God, and he did so by faith. In order for one to please God today, he must walk by faith (2 Corinthians 5:7). Faith comes by hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17). Thus, to please God, one must walk in faithful obedience to the word of God.

The word of God teaches Christians to sing and make melody in their hearts to the Lord (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16). Quoting from the 22nd Psalm, the author of Hebrews says, “I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praises unto thee” (Hebrews 2:12).

I know of no act of worship acceptable to God unless the Bible authorizes that act to be done. Christians are told to sing. I know of no passage of Scripture in the New Testament that talks about mechanical instruments of music in New Testament worship. Therefore, I can have no faith on this subject. “Whatsoever is not of faith is sin” (Romans 14:23).

Since when did God allow the majority in a congregation to determine the kind of worship that pleases Him? When did He ever give elders the authority to legislate concerning the type of music to be used in New Testament worship?

The only way we can know what pleases God in the New Testament age is by reading what God has revealed in the New Testament. It is never wise to speak where God has not spoken. - (1929-2018).

“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. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him” (Colossians 3:16,17). “Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:19).

EDITORIAL . . .

MARRIAGE: A LIFE-LONG
COMMITMENT

By Dalton Key

The words may be neglected, but they are still in the Bible: “He who finds a wife finds a good thing” (Proverbs 18:22). “Rejoice with the wife of your youth” (Proverbs 5:18). “God . . . hates divorce” (Malachi 2:16).

The phrase, “‘Till death do us part” may seem odd and antiquated in our post-marriage, post-family, post-moral world, but such has been heaven’s plan for man since the very beginning.

I once heard a tale about a preacher, who in the course of an otherwise ordinary marriage ceremony, had come to the time for the exchange of vows. He looked to the groom and asked solemnly, “Will you take this woman, for better or worse, in sickness and in health, for richer or for poorer?” The nervous groom, apparently taking it as a matter of multiple choice, stammered, “I’ll take better, healthy, and richer!”

Whether apocryphal or not, the story makes a valid point. Too many spouses come into marriage with the same desires, the same expectations, the same demands as this addled groom. They are determined to make a go of it . . . unless something goes wrong. All is well until problems arise.

And arise they will. The time will come when the honeymoon is over, dirty dishes are piling up in the sink and the baby won’t stop crying in the crib. The time will come when bills are many, money is short, tempers are flared, and the back door seems the best and easiest way out. The going gets tough and those who should be tough often get going - in the wrong direction!

When marriages become as disposable as diapers, something has gone terribly wrong.

The British historian, Edward Gibbon, listed five primary reasons for the collapse of the Roman Empire, the first of which was “the rapid increase of divorce, with the undermining of the sanctity of the home, which is the basis of society.” During the reign of Nero, according to Seneca, women were measuring the years by the number of their husbands. By the time Rome fell, marriage had become completely severed from morality and was considered little more than a legal construct.

When marriage fails, so goes a nation! A people cannot long survive when “as long as we both shall live” is replaced with “as long as we both shall love.”

The words of our Lord still ring true and are long overdue for attention: “Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh?’ So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate” (Matthew 19:4-6)



I WILL NOT BE ENSLAVED

By Cecil May Jr.

A few winters back during a bitter cold spell, I was sitting in a warm restaurant enjoying a hot meal and a steaming cup of coffee. Through a nearby window, close enough to touch him if the class had not been between us, was a tall young man in a short-sleeve shirt. He was probably in his forties. He was shivering. He was smoking a cigarette, taking puffs between shivers. How addictive! How enslaving nicotine must be to compel an otherwise sensible, healthy young person to leave the inside warmth and stand freezing to inhale some cigarette smoke! “I will not be enslaved to anything.”

Smart phones, texting, Facebook, Instagram, the internet: all can be effective tools for accomplishing good ends. Like others, I find myself saying, “I don’t know how we got along without them.” However, they too can be addictive, enslaving. A mother told me she across the table from her teenage son as he sat with earbuds, texting. She tried to talk to him, but he was oblivious. She finally took out her phone and texted him!

If social media interferes with family time, if you cannot talk

intelligibly with friends for tweeting or texting, if you cannot bear to be separated from your phone for even a few minutes, you might ask yourself, “Am I addicted?” We should say with Paul, “I will not be enslaved by anything.”

During football season I follow my favorite college teams and a few adopted pro teams. However, for some, it seems sports is their religion and their team is their god. Their conversation year around is about their team and the teams their team will play. They spend thousands of dollars a weekend to go to games. Their joy or deep grief is wrapped up in whether their team wins or loses. Are we teaching our children that Bible study and worship assemblies are more important than ball practice or ball games? Compare the time, interest, money and intensity of involvement in sports with the time, interest, money and conversation about Christ, worship and help for the needy! Remember, “‘All things are lawful,’ but I will not be enslaved by anything.”

— Montgomery, AL

RIGHTEOUSNESS EXALTS A NATION

By Bobby Dockery

Eventually Rome, the mightiest empire the world had known, collapsed when its burden of wickedness became too great to bear.

And America????

Righteousness is America’s greatest defense; sin is our window of ultimate vulnerability.

Do you love your country? Do you want to do something good for it? Then do all you can to help turn America’s heart back to God! - Fayetteville, AR

(As Alexis de Tocqueville once famously observed: “America is great because she is good. If America ceases to be good, America will cease to be great.”)

“Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth! For the Lord has spoken: ‘I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me; The ox knows its owner and the donkey its master’s crib; but Israel does not know, my people do not consider.’ Alas, sinful

nation, a people laden with iniquity, a brood of evildoers, children who are corrupters! They have forsaken the Lord, they have provoked to anger the Holy One of Israel, they have turned away backward (Isaiah 1:2-4).

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