

How the “Christian” World Has Been Deceived

Millions have been cleverly misled—could that include you?

In spite of being forewarned in the Word of God, today the vast majority of professing “Christians” are deceived! Why? Because they do not read and study their Bibles for themselves, but believe the religious teachings of their leaders. As a result, most have failed to heed the repeated warnings of Jesus Christ and His apostles. Jesus specifically warned His disciples that false prophets would come in sheep’s clothing, presenting themselves as messengers of God—and yet deceive the majority of people. While they would proclaim the name of Jesus and acknowledge Him as Savior, they would teach evil things in His name: “But beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep’s clothing, for within *they* are ravening wolves. **You shall know them by their fruits.** They do not gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles, do they? In the same way, every good tree produces good fruit, but a corrupt tree produces evil fruit. A good tree cannot produce evil fruit, nor can a corrupt tree produce good fruit. Every tree *that is* not producing good fruit is cut down and is cast into the fire. Therefore, **you shall assuredly know them by their fruits.**” (Matt. 7:15-20).

Knowing someone by their fruit involves examining their teachings and behavior. If such teachers do not conform to the teachings of Jesus Christ, then they are not of God—though they preach in His name and even perform miracles (Matt. 24:24). Jesus said they are workers of lawlessness! Inspired by Satan the devil, they substitute their own religious teachings and traditions for the commandments and laws of God. This is especially obvious in the holiday traditions of Orthodox Christendom and Protestantism, many of which are rooted in abominable pagan religious practices.

How did the very abominations that God says He hates come to be observed by those who call themselves “Christians”?

A False Christianity Arises: Apostasy within the very Church of God began before the original apostles of Jesus Christ had even died. Shortly before his death, the apostle Peter gave this prophetic warning: “But there were also false prophets among the people, as indeed **there will be false teachers among you, who will stealthily introduce destructive heresies**, personally denying *the* Lord who bought them, and bringing swift destruction upon themselves. And many people will follow *as authoritative* their destructive ways; *and* because of them, **the way of the truth will be blasphemed**. Also, through insatiable greed they will with enticing messages exploit you for gain; for whom the judgment of old is in *full* force, and their destruction is *ever* watching” (II Pet. 2:1-3).

In his epistle, Jude, a brother of the Lord Jesus Christ, emphatically warned the brethren to stand for the truth that was originally delivered by Jesus Christ and the apostles. He urged them to resist ungodly men who were infiltrating the churches and changing the grace of God into a lie: “Beloved, when personally exerting all *my* diligence to write to you concerning the common salvation, I was compelled to write to you, exhorting *you* to fervently fight for the faith, which once for all *time* has been delivered to the saints. For certain men have stealthily crept in, those who long ago have been written about, condemning *them* to this judgment. *They are* ungodly men, who are perverting the grace of our God, *turning it* into licentiousness, and are personally denying the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ” (Jude 3-4).

The apostasy that began during the lifetimes of the apostles rapidly developed after the last original apostle, John, died in about 99-100 AD. Within twenty years of his death a vastly different, counterfeit “Christian” church began to emerge. Historian Jesse Lyman Hurlburt summarized this critical period: “At the end of the first century, the doctrines set forth by the Apostle Paul in the Epistle to the Romans were accepted throughout the church as the standards of the

faith. The teachings of St. Peter and St. John in their epistles show a complete accord with the views of St. Paul. Heretical opinions were arising and sects were forming, the germs of which had been noted and warned against by the apostles, but their full development came later” (*The Story of the Christian Church*, p. 44).

It was not long before this apostasy gained popularity and power. As Hurlburt notes: “We name the last generation of the first century, from 68 to 100 AD, ‘The Age of Shadows,’ partly because the gloom of persecution was over the church; but more especially because of all periods in the history, it is the one about which we know the least. We have no longer the clear light of the Book of Acts to guide us; and no author of that age has filled the blank of history. We would like to read of the later work by such helpers of St. Paul as Timothy, Apollos and Titus, but all these and St. Paul’s other friends drop out of the record at his death. **For fifty years after St. Paul’s life a curtain hangs over the church, through which we strive vainly to look; and when at last it arises, about 120 A. D. with the writings of the earliest church fathers, we find a church in many aspects very different from that in the days of St. Peter and St. Paul**” (Ibid., p. 42; emphasis added).

In succeeding centuries the religious leaders of this apostate Christianity further developed their counterfeit teachings, traditions and dogmas, branding many of the true teachings of Jesus and His apostles as “heresy.” They continually adapted pagan practices—via various holidays—into Christendom. Over time these practices became so entrenched that today when “Christians” encounter the truth of the Word of God through public preaching or personal study, they find it almost unbelievable.

The Religious Traditions of Men: The easiest way to incorporate a teaching into a religious system is to surround it with tradition. In the case of Judaism, Scripture cites the “traditions of the elders.” In the case of Christendom, traditions originated with the early “church fathers.” In both cases, men brought in false doctrines by establishing traditions. Once a tradition has been established, it becomes “dogma”—considered to have equal or even greater authority than the very Word of God.

During His earthly ministry, Jesus continually confronted and rebuked the Jewish religious leaders for esteeming their traditions above the God-breathed Scriptures. While hypocritically giving lip service to God, they actually rejected and replaced the Word of God with their traditions. We find an account of one such confrontation in the Gospel of Mark: “Then the Pharisees and some of the scribes from Jerusalem came together to Him. And when they saw some of His disciples eating with defiled hands (that is, unwashed *hands*), they found fault. **For the Pharisees and all the Jews, holding fast to the tradition of the elders**, do not eat unless they wash their hands thoroughly. Even *when coming* from the market, they do not eat unless they *first* wash themselves. And there are many other things that they have received to observe, *such as the* washing of cups and pots and brass utensils and tables. For this reason, the Pharisees and the scribes questioned Him, *saying*, ‘**Why don’t Your disciples walk according to the tradition of the elders**, but eat bread with unwashed hands?’

“And He answered *and* said to them, ‘Well did Isaiah prophesy concerning you hypocrites, as it is written, “**This people honors Me with their lips, but their hearts are far away from Me. But in vain do they worship Me, teaching for doctrine the commandments of men.**” For leaving the commandment of God, you hold fast the tradition of men, *such as the* washing of pots and cups; and you practice many other things like *this*.’ Then He said to them, ‘**Full well do you reject the commandment of God, so that you may observe your own tradition ... nullifying the authority of the Word of God by your tradition which you have passed down; and you practice many traditions such as this**’ ” (Mark 7:1-9, 13).

Some 1440 years before the ministry of Jesus Christ, God commanded the children of Israel not to add to or take away from the Word of God; neither were they to adopt the religious

rituals of the Canaanites, who were idolaters and sun worshipers. Furthermore, they were not to worship the true God in the same manner that the heathen worshiped their idol gods: “When the LORD your God shall cut off the nations before you, where you go to possess them, and you take their place and dwell in their land, **take heed to yourself that you do not become ensnared by following them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not ask about their gods, saying, ‘How did these nations serve their gods that I may also do likewise?’** You shall not do so to the LORD your God, for every abomination to the LORD, which He hates, they have done to their gods; even their sons and their daughters they have burned in the fire to their gods. **Whatever thing that I command you, be careful to do it. You shall not add to it, nor take away from it.**” (Deut. 12:29-32). Nearly all the added traditions of Judaism violated this command of God. (The oral traditions of Judaism were later codified in the Mishnah in the second century AD and in the Talmud in the fourth century AD.)

While Orthodox Christendom maintains a pretense of upholding the Scriptures, it in fact holds the traditions of men on par with, or esteems them greater than, the Scriptures. These traditions originated in the teachings of the so-called “early church fathers,” who were some of the leading apostate teachers from the second to fourth centuries AD. For example, upon close examination it becomes apparent that nearly all of the teachings of Roman Catholicism are based upon human traditions, arbitrary edicts of popes and misinterpretations of Scripture, rather than on sound scriptural interpretation alone. Hence, just as in Judaism, their traditions have replaced the Word of God.

In *My Catholic Faith*, Louis LaRavoire Morrow writes: “Divine Revelation comes down to us by two means: through Holy Scripture, written down under divine inspiration, and through Tradition, handed down orally from Apostolic times. We read the Bible with great respect, for it is the Word of God. We treat Tradition with as great reverence, for God speaks through Tradition as well. **It is wrong to believe the Bible alone without Tradition**” (p. 22; emphasis added).

This is absolutely false! The Bible, and the Bible alone, is to be believed—it is the only standard upon which all teachings are to be based. Traditions of men are to be rejected, not sanitized and given new “Christian” meanings so that “the faithful” may freely observe them.

Morrow further states that Roman Catholicism could preach the gospel without even having the Bible. “*It would have been possible for the Church to bring the truths of Jesus Christ to all mankind without the Bible....* Even today it is possible for many people to learn about Jesus Christ without reading the Scriptures” (Ibid., p. 28; emphasis added). This teaching is also patently contrary to the teaching of the Old and New Testaments.

When the apostle Paul wrote to instruct Timothy about what he was to teach, he made no appeal to the oral traditions of men. Instead, he clearly pointed to the Word of God as the only basis for sound teaching. “**Diligently study** to present yourself approved unto God, a workman who does not *need to be* ashamed, **rightly dividing the Word of the truth**; but avoid profane and vain babblings [the traditions and doctrines of men] because they will *only* give rise to more ungodliness, and their words will eat away at the body like gangrene; of whom are Hymeneus and Philetus, **who have gone astray from the truth**, claiming that the resurrection has already taken place, and are destroying the faith of some. Nevertheless, the foundation of God stands firm...” (II Tim. 2:15-19).

Paul further encouraged Timothy concerning the written Word of God: “But *as for* you, continue in the things that you did learn and were assured of, knowing from whom you have learned *them*; and that from a child **you have known the holy writings** [the Old Testament], which are able to make you wise unto salvation through faith, which *is* in Christ Jesus. **All Scripture** [Old and New Testaments] **is God-breathed** and *is* profitable for doctrine, for conviction, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; so that the man of God may be complete, fully equipped for every good work” (II Tim 3:14-17).

Again, Paul did not make a single appeal to any so-called oral traditions of men for his authority, but only to the God-breathed Scriptures. The apostle Peter—who Roman Catholicism falsely claims was the first pope—also condemned the vain traditions of men and upheld the authority of the Word of God. **“Knowing that you were not redeemed by corruptible things, by silver or gold, from your futile way of living, inherited by tradition from your forefathers; but by the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot; Who truly was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but was manifested in these last times for your sakes; even for you who through Him do believe in God, Who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope might be in God. Having purified your lives by obedience to the Truth unto unfeigned brotherly love through the Spirit, love one another fervently with a pure heart. For you have been begotten again, not from corruptible seed, but from incorruptible seed, by the living Word of God, which remains forever”** (I Pet. 1:18-23).

Paul charged those who would preach to preach only the Word of God, Old and New Testaments. “I charge you, therefore, in the sight of God, even the Lord Jesus Christ, Who is ready to judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: **Preach the Word! Be urgent in season and out of season; convict, rebuke, encourage, with all patience and doctrine.** For there shall come a time when they will not tolerate sound doctrine; but according to their own lusts they shall accumulate to themselves a great number of teachers, having ears itching to hear what satisfies their cravings; but **they shall turn away their own ears from the truth; and they shall be turned aside unto myths** [the traditions of men]” (II Tim. 4:1-4).

The apostle Peter wrote that the Word of God alone is the truth, not cleverly concocted myths. “Therefore, I will not neglect to make you always mindful of these things, although you already know them and have been established in **the present truth**.... But I will make every effort that, after my departure, you may always have a written remembrance of these things in order to practice them for yourselves, **for we did not follow cleverly concocted myths as our authority, when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His magnificent glory;** because He received glory and honor from God the Father when the voice came to Him from the Majestic Glory, ‘This is My Son, the Beloved, in Whom I am well pleased.’ And this is the voice from heaven that we heard when we were with Him on the holy mountain. We also possess the confirmed prophetic Word [God-breathed New Testament] to which you do well to pay attention, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts; **knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture originated as anyone’s own private interpretation; because prophecy was not brought at any time by human will, but the holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit”** (II Pet. 1:12, 15-21).

Peter also wrote that there would be false teachers (inspired by Satan the devil) who would introduce destructive heresies (II Pet. 2:1-2).

Satan and his Ministers Appear to be Righteous: The master deceiver cleverly masquerades as an angel of light. He even quotes Scripture—but not for the sake of the truth. Instead, as he did when he tempted Jesus Christ for forty days and forty nights, Satan misapplies the truth of Scripture (Matt. 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13). Likewise his ministers use the same tactics today.

The apostle Paul warned the Corinthians concerning these false apostles. He wrote, “But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds might be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For indeed, if someone comes **preaching another Jesus, whom we did not preach, or you receive a different spirit, which you did not receive, or a different gospel, which you did not accept, you put up with it as something good**.... For such are false apostles—deceitful workers who are transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And it is no marvel, for **Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light.** Therefore, it is no great thing if his servants also transform themselves as ministers of righteousness—whose

end shall be according to their works” (II Cor. 11:3-4, 13-15).

The brethren of Corinth were allowing these false apostles to have authority over their lives, even to the point of spiritual abuse. Because of the seriousness of the situation, Paul attempted to bring them to their senses by exposing their foolishness for listening to such teachers. “Since many [false apostles] boast according to *the* flesh, I also will boast. **For since you are so intelligent** [thinking they knew more than Paul did], **you gladly bear with fools. For you bear it if anyone brings you into bondage, if anyone devours you, if anyone takes from you, if anyone exalts himself, if anyone beats you on the face.** I speak as though we were under reproach for being weak; but in whatever *way* anyone else is bold (I speak in foolishness), I also am bold. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they *the* seed of Abraham? So am I. **Are they servants of Christ?** (I am speaking as if I were out of my mind.)” (verses 18-23).

Likewise, the apostle Peter exhorted the brethren to beware of the teachings of men who use these devious tactics: “And bear in mind that the long-suffering of our Lord *is* salvation, exactly as our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has also written to you; as *he has* also in all *his* epistles, speaking in them concerning these things; in which are some things *that are* difficult to understand, which **the ignorant and unstable are twisting and distorting, as they also twist and distort the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.** Therefore, beloved, since you know this in advance, be on guard against *such practices*, lest you be led astray with the error of the lawless ones, *and* you fall from your own steadfastness” (II Pet. 3:15-17). And again, Paul wrote, “For we are not like the many, who for *their own* profit are corrupting the Word of God; but we speak with sincerity, as from God, *and* before God, *and* in Christ” (II Cor. 2:17).

In his letter to the Thessalonians, Paul commanded the brethren to prove all things and to avoid every form of wickedness. “**Prove all things. Hold fast to that which is good. Abstain from every form of wickedness**” (I Thess. 5:21-22). Therefore, all religious teachings must be examined and judged in the light of God’s Word, the God-breathed Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments. If any teaching does not conform to the teachings of the Bible, it is to be *rejected* as false, for “if they do not speak according to this Word, *it is* because *there is* no light in them” (Isa. 8:20).