
THE ATTRACTION OF THE AGES

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Jesus said: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me" (John 12:32)

No person has ever had the influence upon the lives of so many people for such a long period of time like Jesus Christ. A seer has said: "Twenty centuries have come and gone, and today He is the central figure of the human race and the leader of mankind's progress. All the armies that ever marched, all the navies that ever sailed, all the parliaments that ever sat, all the kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of man on this earth as this one solitary life."

Why is this so wonderfully true? Surely not because of ancestral, political, or social prestige. Despite the fact that Jesus was the foster son of a lowly carpenter in despised Nazareth, though there was no room for Him in the inn, and though the first cries of this newborn infant was heard only by His parents and the stable animals, and despite the statement of the scriptures that He "hath not where to lay His head," still our Lord is the attraction of the ages.

What was the amazing reason for the attractiveness of our Lord. What magnetic drawing power did He possess? How did He by his tragic death on Calvary know that He would draw all men

unto Himself? What other marvelous qualities did this meek, kind, compassionate, and lovable man of Galilee have that so pulled mankind away from sin and worldly things, and prompted them to rise up and follow Him.

Jesus is attractive because of the things He said. His teaching was so different, so revolutionary, so extraordinary, that even those sent to arrest Him, said of Him: "Never man spake like this man" (John 7:46).

Jesus is attractive because of the things He did. His supernatural feats, miracles, and wisdom have attracted and continue to hold man in perpetual wonder. Never man performed the works that Jesus did.

Jesus is attractive because of His actions toward others. He wept with the sorrowing, rejoiced in the happy society of His day, prayed for His enemies, and healed the sick and suffering. Such marvelous actions had never been so fully demonstrated before.

Jesus is attractive because of His perfect life. The attractiveness of Jesus-what a subject!

EDITORIAL

“... WHOSE WIFE SHALL SHE BE OF THE SEVEN”

Jesus is Rabbi (John 3:2), the Master Teacher (Matthew 19:16), the teachers' teacher. No man spoke as he spoke or taught as he taught (Matthew 7:28-29). On numerous occasions his foes sought to ensnare Jesus in his own words (see Matthew 16:1; 19:3; 22:35; Mark 12:13; John 8:6), but his masterful use of logic and reasoning left his detractors unable to answer (Matthew 22:46). It is in the course of one of these "trials" that the question in the title is posed (Matthew 22:28). Initially, the Pharisees and the Herodians (more a political sect than a religious one) came to Jesus with the intent to trap Jesus in his words. They, therefore, posed a question regarding the paying of tribute to Caesar (Matthew 22:17). The answer of Jesus astonished many to the point that they simply went away, unable to confound the Master Teacher (Matthew 22:22). The same day the Sadducees approached Jesus with the hopes of entangling him in his teaching (Matthew 23:23). The Sadducees were a religious sect which stood in opposition to the Pharisees. While smaller in number than the Pharisees, many of the aristocracy belonged to the sect of the Sadducees. Their primary contentions were that the written law of Moses was the only law to guide Israel (the Pharisees asserted and taught that oral tradition was just as binding as the Law), and that there is no resurrection of the dead. This latter doctrine also caused the Sadducees to reject the idea of angels and spirits, as well as the idea of future reward or punishment.

The question posed by the Sadducees on this occasion was based on the duty of a brother to raise up seed to continue the seed-line of his departed brother (Deuteronomy 25:5-10; read also Ruth 4:1-12). The Law of Moses required that the brother next to the deceased brother take his former sister-in-law as his own wife. The first child born to this union was to take the name of the deceased brother, so that his line might continue. Should the kinsman refuse to accept this responsibility, it was to be made known unto all that are in the city in a public display (Deuteronomy 25:8-10). Based upon this law of the redeemer-kinsman, the Sadducees then pose their query to Jesus. Suppose a man took a wife, and died before being able to bring children into their union. His brother accepted his responsibility according to the

law, taking his brother's wife as his own, but also died before being able to raise up seed to continue his brother's line. This scenario is repeated until all seven brothers have taken this woman to wife, but failed to bring children into the marriage. The question is then posed to Jesus, "In the resurrection, whose wife shall she be of the seven?" (Matthew 22:28). The response of Jesus to their inquiry is both pointed and to the point, a display of masterful logic, taking advantage of the opportunity to teach even beyond the direct answer to their question.

Jesus responds to their question, "Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God" (Matthew 22:29). The Sadducees showed great ignorance of the Scriptures, both in their misunderstanding of the resurrection and in their error regarding the nature of marriage as it pertains to life beyond this earthly existence. Marriage was designed by the Almighty in order that man might be complete—physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. It must be remembered that as God surveyed His handiwork before the creation of woman, He acknowledged that it was "good" (Genesis 1:25). But upon realizing that it was "not good that the man should be alone" (Genesis 2:18), God created a helper suitable for man, and His assessment of the creation was upgraded to "very good" (Genesis 1:31). While marriage serves to make man whole in so many ways, it is intended primarily to serve as a means whereby man might enjoy companionship (Genesis 2:20) and sexual fulfillment (Genesis 2:24), and procreate (Genesis 1:28) in a Divinely-approved manner (Hebrews 13:4). God also designed the marriage relationship to be binding until death (Romans 7:1-4). Death severs this most tender and sacred of human relationships, thus showing that marriage is not intended to continue throughout eternity. In heaven, wherein flesh and blood shall not enter (1 Corinthians 15:50), the purposes accomplished in marriage will no longer be present or necessary. From the resurrection onward, man will neither marry or give in marriage, but will be as the angels (Matthew 22:30). So far as it can be determined from Scripture, angels are asexual beings, and being completely spiritual in their makeup, have no

need for, nor do they desire, the fulfillment of physical longings. It is not to be understood that man becomes an angel after death, but is merely likened to the angels in this regard of the marriage relationship as it pertains to life hereafter.

As touching the resurrection, the Sadducees displayed the same ignorance as they had regarding marriage. It is said that the Sadducees denied the resurrection because it is not explicitly stated in the Pentateuch. Jesus addresses their gross misunderstanding of the resurrection, as he quotes from Exodus 3:6 to show that though Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had long been dead, God speaks of them in the present state of being ("I am the God of Abraham..., not, "I was the God of Abraham..."). Herein was sufficient proof, even from their own Pentateuch, that the Old Testament patriarchs were familiar with and believed in the resurrection of the dead. Hebrews 11 certainly reveals that the great champions of the Israelites looked with great hope and anticipation to the resurrection of the dead: Abraham was convinced that God would resurrect Isaac when he was called upon to take the life of his son (Hebrews 11:19), and many others suffered for their faith knowing that they would obtain a better resurrection (Hebrews 11:35). Job posed the question, "If a man die, shall he live again?" (Job 14:14). His trust in the power and the goodness of God led him to conclude, "And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God" (Job 19:26). Daniel also believed in the resurrection at the last day: "And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt" (Daniel 12:2). Isaiah touches on the resurrection when he states, "Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise" (Isaiah 26:19). David longed for the hope of the resurrection, and the joy that would accompany his reunion with the son born to the illicit relationship between him and Bathsheba. After praying and grieving for the sick child, David cleansed himself and worshipped God at the news of the death of his child. When questioned by his servants as to why he would pray and weep while the child lived, yet not do so when the child died (2 Samuel 12:21), David replied, "But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me" (2 Samuel 12:23). No, the resurrection was not simply a New Testament concept. It was clearly something for which the men and women of faith longed and into which they placed their hope. What a miserable existence for the Sadducees, and for all those who live life without the hope of life beyond this life: "If in

this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable" (1 Corinthians 15:19)!

WOT

TO BE A PEARL

Eva Nell Brown Naramore

Around the grain of sand that's in
The oyster shell, the pearl begins.
With difficult annoying grime
A precious gem is formed in time.

Much like the word of God that's sown,
Can form a pearl from hearts of stone.
From inside out, the mind, the soul,
Pearl of great price, with worth untold.

God placed us here, we're in the world.
We're the sand that makes the pearl.
Not perfect, but with time to grow,
The luster of each pearl will grow.

The grime of sin annoys the heart,
But love can help us make a start.
With forming of the pearl inside,
When finished, there's no way to hide.

Its glowing luster, like a rose,
Gives life reflection, and it shows.
Formed by God's word, while here on earth,
The finished pearl will have great worth.

Because of sin, some pearls are lost.
If never found, how great the cost!
While living here, to be a pearl
Means more to us than all the world.

When all the pearls are gathered in,
A place we'll have in heaven then.
Around the throne with loved ones there,
No way can other pearls compare.

A FORMER MEMBER OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

Brandon Britton, Pulaski, TN

Recently a friend of mine read me some of the saddest and most terrifying words I have ever heard. The words were from an obituary for a funeral he was about to preach. The obituary told of a woman who lived an active, good life. She had a loving family and a good job, but it was the closing statement that cast a shadow over the summary of her life. "She was a **former** member of the church of Christ." If a person understands that salvation is in the church/body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22-23; 5:23), there are no more tragic words. I was immediately reminded of the words of Jesus when He said, "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matthew 16:26). I could not help but think of the time when, "many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him" (John 6:66) after He had done so much for them. Obviously heartbroken at the departure of so many former disciples He turned to the apostles and asked, "Will ye also go away?", to which Peter replied, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life" (John 6:67-68). Therein lies the tragedy of the statement "a former member of the church of Christ." When one goes away from the Lord, there is nowhere else to turn for eternal life and they forfeit the only way to heaven (John 14:6).

I do not profess to know the reason this lady was a "former" member of the church of Christ. It may be that she joined a man-made church, a denomination. It may be that she abandoned her faith and left the church. Regardless of the reason, the word "former" says it all.

Perhaps the greatest tragedy is that this is not an isolated incident. This woman is just one of many throughout the centuries who have fallen away. I have no doubt that we can all recall those in the congregations we attend who have left their first love. The Lord and His inspired preachers warned of the danger of leaving Him and rebuked those who had.

"Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching. For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins...Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the

blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?"(Hebrews 10:25,26,29). "For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world" (2 Timothy 4:10).

While admittedly I cannot pass judgment on how or why this person became a former member of the church of Christ, I feel confident in saying that it was likely a gradual drifting, rather than an abrupt turning away. The Bible warns us, "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip" (Hebrews 2:1). The American Standard Version translates the last part of that passage, "lest haply they should drift away." I have yet to meet a single Christian who woke up one day and just decided on the spot to abandon his faith. I have, however, met dozens who little by little began drifting farther and farther from the Lord, only to finally abandon their faith altogether.

If all of the former members of the church of Christ were to return this Sunday our buildings could not hold them. Please do not let your obituary say you "were a former member of the church of Christ," but a "faithful member."

WOT

PLEASE SUBMIT CHANGE OF ADDRESS!

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MORE THAN “THOU SHALT NOT”

Tyler Young, Roanoke, TX

On a sign outside a Bastini Café in Bombay, India, were the following words:

Sorry: No talking to cashier. No smoking. No fighting. No credit. No outside food. No sitting long. No talking loud. No spitting. No bargaining. No water to outsiders. No change. No telephone. No match sticks. No discussing gambling. No newspaper. No combing. No beef. No leg on chair. No hard liquor allowed. No address enquiry.

Upon encountering this catalog of prohibitions, a patron might wonder exactly what he could do in the café. It might have saved the owner time and space had he merely listed the few things that are permitted in his establishment. After all, a long list of negatives is not exactly inviting to passersby.

It is unfortunate that some view the religion of Christ as just that: a checklist of “Thou shalt nots,” a restrictive code prohibiting this, condemning that. Equally regrettable is that a lack of balance in preaching and teaching may have given some that same impression. Especially can this be true when working with young people or new converts. Anxious to admonish their worldliness, we put up a sign before them: “No dancing; no smoking; no drinking; no cussing; no fornicating; no short shorts; no mixed swimming;” on and on the list seems to go. In our zeal to move them to holiness, we may leave them to wonder, “Is this all there is to being a Christian?”

Of course we need to condemn sin. Woe to those among us who accommodate our postmodern, New Age culture in which people want a made-to-fit religion of “relationship, not rules.” More and more we encounter those who want all the benefits of following Jesus without actually having to follow him; they seek the comfort of Christ while shunning what they perceive to be all of those cumbersome commands. Brethren who cater to this ungodly spirit by soft-peddling the gospel are a disgrace to the name of Christ.

As distasteful as it sounds to some, being in a right relationship with God requires keeping certain rules. If we disdain “commandment-keeping religion,” we disdain the Lord himself, who said, “If you love me, you will

keep my commandments” (John 14:15). Scripture does contain lists of “thou shalt nots” (Rom. 1:18ff; 1 Cor. 6:9ff; Gal. 5:19ff; Eph. 5:3ff; et al), the most famous of which thundered from Sinai and was engraved on tablets of stone in the long ago (Exo. 20:1ff). Our God is a commandment-giving God, and our preaching is not pleasing to him if we are not firmly, forthrightly, and frequently informing people that when it comes to sin, “they that practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God” (Gal. 5:21).

Our point here, however, is that as essential as it is to obey the word of God, we have missed the heart of the gospel if we emphasize only the “Thou-shalt nots” of God’s word and leave the impression we believe we are justified by a legalistic and boastful pride in abstaining from this evil or avoiding that error. Zeal for keeping the law is commendable and necessary, but we must remember that we fail to do so perfectly, which is why we need the grace God has extended to us through the atonement of his Son.

We dare not denigrate keeping commands, but neither should we forget that there is much, much more to the kingdom of God. As we expose sin, let us show with equal emphasis the joys and privileges of being the children of God. Jesus demanded repentance (“Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish,” Luke 13:3) and offered blessings (“Come unto me...and I will give you rest,” Mat. 11:28). Has he not “granted to us his precious and exceeding great promises” (2 Pet. 1:4)? Then let us say so. After all, we will be more inclined to strive to abide by that list of things we are not supposed to do if we see next to it that list of things—peace, forgiveness, hope, help and more—our gracious God sacrificed his Son to give us.

WOT

GENESIS 3: TOPICS TO STUDY

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After the wonderful and beautiful account of creation in Genesis 1, we are told the creation account again in chapter 2 from a slightly different perspective. Emphasis is given to man and his relationship with God. This paves the way for the sad turn of events found in chapter 3. Often called "The Fall of Man," Genesis 3 teaches us much about Satan, man, sin, God, and many other subjects.

In this article, I will suggest several topics of study that come from this sad chapter. Please take these topics and study them on your own.

1. Satan is the enemy (v. 1). Satan, in the form of a serpent, enters the Garden of Eden and immediately tempts Eve (and Adam, who was with her). While Satan makes certain things seem good and pleasing, we need to remember that he is not on our side; in fact, he never will be. Peter gives us these explicit words: "Be sober, be vigilant; *your adversary* the devil, as a roaring lion, walks about, seeking whom he may devour" (First Peter 5:8, emphasis added).
2. Shadiness of deceit (vv. 2-5). God had given the command to avoid eating of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil with the sobering promise, "In the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (2:17). Satan was able to use his intelligence to take what God said and change it just enough for Adam and Eve to believe his words. Deception is often hard to detect, but we must continue to have our minds ready for Satan's schemes.
3. Shamefulness of disobedience (vv. 6-7). Once Adam and Eve sinned, they were aware of their nakedness, and they were ashamed. May I make an obvious, but often overlooked statement? Sin should be shameful! We often think of "large" sins (adultery, embezzlement, etc.) as shameful, but we may have a "pet" sin that we don't think is so terrible. Friend, when we sin, it should cause us shame! God has put a conscience within us to pain us when we sin. Cultivate that conscience for good, not for allowance of sin.
4. Seeking nature of God (vv. 8-9). God didn't ask Adam and Eve "Where are you?" for His own information. God knows all. God asked the question for Adam and Eve's benefit. It is worth noting, though, that God sought out Adam and Eve, even in this moment of sin.
5. Shifting the blame (vv. 10-13). Eve attempts to place the blame for her actions on the serpent, while Adam tries to place the blame on Eve, and then on God for creating the woman! We live in a society that tells us to blame anyone but ourselves. If you can't find another person to blame, just blame the overall society. "It's got to be someone else's fault," is the mantra of the day. We need to learn to take responsibility for our own actions, and we need to learn to admit when something is our own fault.
6. Superiority of God (v. 14). If you were casually reading this chapter, you would think that Satan is in control...until you come to verse 14. From that point on, it is obvious that God is the One who is ultimately in control of this account, and of all history. God is powerful enough to curse the serpent, which only gives us a glimpse of His supreme nature. It should be reassuring to the Christian to know that God is more powerful than Satan; God is superior.
7. Supreme promise of hope (v. 15). Verse 15 is the first small glimmer of light that will ultimately come to full consummation in the Messiah—Jesus. While dim at this point, those of us who know the whole story of redemption come often to this verse as a supreme promise, since it is the first. Christ uttered, "It is finished!" just prior to dying on the cross. One of the "finished" things was the promise given in Genesis 3:15. Though His death and subsequent resurrection, Jesus crushed the head of Satan. Christ has already won the war!
8. Sobering nature of punishment (vv. 16-19). Punishment is never fun, but it is necessary. As a loving parent will punish an unruly child, so the loving God must punish disobedience. God required certain things of Adam and Eve for their sins, but it is worth remembering that neither got what they truly deserved. Whenever we sin, we deserve to be thrown into hell immediately, but God's steadfast love is there for us. He will and does punish, but He also still has mercy on us.
9. Supplying nature of God (vv. 20-21). Though He punished Adam and Eve, God still gave them what

they needed at this point. He provided for this couple the comfortable and lasting clothes they would need in their new life of hard labor and pain. God continues to give gifts to us daily, though we deserve none of them. From the air we breathe to the food we eat to our health, God grants us so many gifts we cannot count them all. Be thankful to Him that He supplies abundantly.

10. Separation caused by sin (vv. 22-24). From this first sin, we get a picture of how seriously God takes sin. Isaiah would later say that our sins separate us from God (59:1-2). Adam and Eve were literally driven from the paradise they knew as home. While God is ever near, when we sin, we place a barrier between ourselves and our Creator. Sin is serious and, left unrepented of, will cause the ultimate separation.

While Adam and Eve were driven from the Tree of Life, we can be drawn closer to it by obedience to our Father. May we daily strive to follow Him and avoid Satan and his schemes. Let us learn from this sad chapter in man's history.

WOT

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ASK A BIBLE QUESTION

QUESTION: Please explain the meaning of the phrase “begat he us by the word of truth” found in James 1:18.

ANSWER: The word “begat” is the same as “born again” in John 3:3. It speaks of the new birth. This new birth is “by the word of truth.” The word “word” is the same that John used (John 1:1) to introduce Jesus Christ as being one with God and yet separate. The Word was God, but at the same time He was a separate and distinct personality from God. He was the One who became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14). He is the Second Person of the Trinity, the Lord Jesus Christ, through whom God regenerates, re-creates the human heart and instills in it the divine nature (Acts 4:12; 1 Tim. 2:5; 2 Pet. 1:4). Therefore, the simplest meaning of the word “Word” is “expression.” It is the articulate sound which comes from the mouth of man to make known what is in his mind. It is the declaration of something; it is preaching. It is the preaching of the Word, the preaching of Christ. Read Romans 10:13-15. However, not every proclamation today is a pronouncement of truth. Some of the preaching today is nothing more than fancy fables (2 Tim. 4:3-4). James 1:18 declares that the instrumentality of the new birth is the “word of truth,” and the truth is Jesus (John 14:6). People are born again through the preaching of the truth, the Christ. The result of the new birth, of this re-creation of God is – we are “a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.” In the OT the firstfruits of the harvest and the first-born belonged to God and the command was to offer them to Him. These firstfruits, therefore, were the unique possession of God. Among His entire creation Christians are uniquely His possession, for we were not only created by Him, but also re-created.

—Mark N. Posey
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