

It Is Written

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THE REALITY OF UNREASON

By Matthew W. Bassford

One of the most fascinating exchanges in the New Testament appears toward the end of Paul's defense before the Jerusalem mob, in Acts 22:17-21. The incident that Paul relates took place shortly after his conversion, after he had fled from Damascus and returned to Jerusalem, still preaching the gospel. While he is praying in the temple, Jesus warns him that he is going to have to flee Jerusalem too.

Paul is bewildered by this. The Jews of Jerusalem know that he used to be Church Persecutor No. 1. He beat and imprisoned all the Christians he could catch. When the Sanhedrin mobbed and murdered Stephen, he cheered them on. Surely somebody like that, whose convictions have changed so spectacularly, is worth listening to! Surely if Saul of Tarsus, a persecutor of the church, now testifies that Jesus is the Christ, the Jews will find that testimony is persuasive!

Paul is both right and wrong. He's right about the power of the evidence he offers. Even now, 2000 years later, his witness to the resurrection is a strong confirmation of our faith.

However, he is wrong about its persuasiveness to the Jews of Jerusalem. His testimony would be enough to win over reasonable people, but those Jews aren't reasonable. Jesus' response implies that their hearts are so hardened against the truth that they will respond with violence instead of conversion. Incredible though it may seem, the gospel will find a better hearing among the pagan Gentiles than among God's chosen people in God's holy city.

Ironically, the reception to Paul's speech proves Jesus right. Prophets had been predicting for a thousand years that the Messiah would save the Gentiles too. Nonetheless, the mob finds this notion so hateful that they begin to riot as soon as the words pass Paul's lips. The Roman commander, who doesn't have a dog in the fight, is so baffled by their reaction that he is willing to torture Paul to figure out what in the world is going on.

Even today, we still struggle with the illusion that others are reasonable people with honest hearts. We show them enough proof to persuade them three times over, and we are bewildered by the negative responses we get. Look at all the evidence for the existence of God! Look at how many Bible verses testify to the importance of baptism! Often, we react by doubling down, by presenting more evidence, by pointing out more verses.

What we fail to understand in such cases is that we aren't dealing with a proof problem. We're dealing with a heart problem. Usually, people reject the truth because they don't want to be Christians. If we press the point, we might make them angry, but we won't make them believe. The sooner we recognize the heart problem and stop arguing, the better.

What about us, though? What about the truths we aren't willing to hear, the Scriptures we aren't willing to consider, the sacred-cow beliefs that we can't bear to challenge? The devil is happy to harden the hearts of Christians too. If we do not love the truth ourselves, especially when it is difficult and painful, we may find ourselves no better off than the Jews who heard Paul's speech. After all, every one of them thought they were faithful servants of God — just like we do.

The "Come as You Are" Method of Church Growth

by Mike Johnson

Churches want to grow in number, but, sadly, many improper methods are used by churches today to increase their membership. One of these is the “Come as You Are” method.

This method of growth is prevalent today in denominationalism. Slogans such as “God loves you no matter what” or “We don’t judge your life” are usually associated with groups using this method of growth. The idea is, “You don’t have to make any changes in your life; you can continue in what you are doing; you can continue in your sin.” Thus, people can continue with adulterous marriages, living together with their “significant other,” social drinking, dishonest business practices, and foul language. Recently, an advertisement for a book started by quoting the author who explained, “God loves us rags and all.” According to the ad, God accepts us for what we are, not for what we do. Many adopt this attitude, and it can help achieve significant numbers for a congregation.

The “come as you are” philosophy is not taught in the Word of God. Instead, the Bible teaches God will not save people in their sins, and He requires a change of heart and life. At Corinth, for example, there was an immoral man in the congregation, and Paul told the Corinthians to withdraw from the individual, delivering him to Satan (I Corinthians 5, II Thessalonians 3:6,10). Paul also told the Corinthians that the unrighteous would not be able to inherit the kingdom of God. He said (I Corinthians 6:9-11), “Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God” (NASB). Also, in Galatians 5:19-22, we are told that people who engage in the “works of the flesh;” practicing such sins as adultery, fornication, hatred, and drunkenness; will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Further, Ephesians 5:11 says, “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.” II Timothy 4:2 points out we are to “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.” Why “reprove” and “rebuke” with our preaching if God accepts everyone the way they are?

Jesus died for all men (John 3:16, Romans 5:6-8), God loves us, and He wants salvation for everyone (II Pet. 3:9). First, however, we must repent (Acts 2:38, 17:30-31), which involves an attitude that will cause us to turn away from our sins. We cannot continue in our sins and still be pleasing to God. Thus, the fornicator, the liar, and the thief must stop their sins. The “come as you are” method of growth, practiced by so many, is not pleasing to God and is an improper method of growth.

"I Hate Every False Way"

By Kyle Campbell

Twice in Psalm 119 is the expression “I hate every false way” (vss. 104, 128). Although the word refers to something that is deceptive, anything that is against God is a “false way.”

A faithful Christian is dedicated to turning away from the false way. Romans 12:19 says, “Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good.” Positively speaking, the Hebrew writer said, “Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.”

Turning from evil or falsehood requires discipline or self-control, which is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:23). If you are sinning, you have to get a hold of yourself and repent. John admonished, “Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God” (3 John 1:11).

Simply put, people who want to see God hate every false way, while people who are rebellious will die in their iniquity. Two paths are before you. Which one will you choose?