

A Lesson Hard Learned

The first sin of mankind was because of believing the deception of another.

(Genesis 3:4, 5) At this the serpent said to the woman: "You certainly will not die. ⁵ For God knows that in the very day you eat from it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and bad."

And the last sin of mankind will also be because of believing the deception of another.

(Revelation 20:7-10) Now as soon as the 1,000 years have ended, Satan will be released from his prison, ⁸ and he will go out to mislead those nations in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Ma'gog, to gather them together for the war. The number of these is as the sand of the sea. ⁹ And they advanced over the whole earth and encircled the camp of the holy ones and the beloved city. But fire came down out of heaven and consumed them. ¹⁰ And the Devil who was misleading them was hurled into the lake of fire and sulfur, where both the wild beast and the false prophet already were; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

Deception, and its consequences, have continually plagued all of mankind from the very beginning. Why is God allowing this to happen? Because a lesson hard learned won't soon be forgotten. Mankind is being taught the hard lesson not to follow anyone other than God and His mediator.

(1 Timothy 2:5) For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, a man, Christ Jesus,

(Matthew 23:10) Neither be called leaders, for your Leader is one, the Christ.

(John 14:6) Jesus said to him: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

Do you understand what that verse is saying? If you try to 'come to the Father' by following anyone else, you will not get there. He is "the way".

But what if they seem to be good men with good intentions?

(Isaiah 2:22) For your own sakes, quit trusting in mere man, Who is only the breath in his nostrils. Why should he be taken into account?

It doesn't say to quit trusting in wicked men, or bad men, or untrustworthy men. It says to quit trusting in "man", meaning any man.

(Psalm 146:3, 4) Do not put your trust in princes Nor in a son of man, who cannot bring salvation.

⁴ His spirit goes out, he returns to the ground; On that very day his thoughts perish.

That verse says the same thing: "*Do not*" trust men. Or as other Bibles put it: *children of men, mortal man, human beings, anyone*. Even if the men have the best of intentions, following and believing what other men say has brought nothing but harm.

(Ecclesiastes 8:9) All of this I have seen, and I applied my heart to every work that has been done under the sun, during the time that man has dominated man to his harm.

The Hebrew word *shalet*, translated in the NWT as "*dominated*", does not refer to harsh or unkind rulership, but merely refers to the exercise or operation of authority over another.

(Jeremiah 17:5a) This is what Jehovah says: "Cursed is the man who puts his trust in mere humans,

The early Israelites had Samuel as their mediator between themselves and God, but they wanted an additional layer. They wanted a human king.

(1 Samuel 8:4-7) In time all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ra'mah. ⁵ They said to him: "Look! You have grown old, but your sons are not walking in your ways. Now appoint for us a king to judge us like all the other nations." ⁶ But it displeased Samuel when they said: "Give us a king to judge us." Then Samuel prayed to Jehovah, ⁷ and Jehovah said to Samuel: "Listen to everything the people say to you; for it is not you whom they have rejected, but it is I whom they have rejected as their king."

(1 Samuel 12:12) When you saw that Na'hash, the king of the Am'mon-ites, had come against you, you kept saying to me, 'No, we are determined to have a king over us!' even though Jehovah your God is your King.

The Israelites still claimed Jehovah as their God, but they wanted more than God's appointed mediator. Jehovah viewed this as a rejection of Him.

Similarly today most Christians are not satisfied with just having God's appointed mediator:

(1 Timothy 2:5) For there is... one mediator between God and men, a man, Christ Jesus,

They are also "*determined*" to have humans be their spiritual leaders.

(Matthew 23:10) Neither be called leaders, for your Leader is one, the Christ.

Jesus warns us against having human spiritual leaders:

(John 14:6) Jesus said to him: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

So although Christians may still claim Jehovah as their God, those that imitate the early Israelites and insist on additional humans to be between themselves and God, they will also be considered by God as rejecting Him because they have rejected His arrangement. (1Sam 8:7) (see my article

"The Holy Trinity (of worship)")

Do you consider yourself unable or unworthy to be in charge of your own worship of God?

(1 Corinthians 3:16-23) Do you not know that you yourselves are God's temple and that the spirit of God dwells in you? ¹⁷ If anyone destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him; for the temple of God is holy, and you are that temple. ¹⁸ Let no one deceive himself: If anyone among you thinks he is wise in this system of things, let him become a fool, so that he may become wise. ¹⁹ For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God, for it is written: "He catches the wise in their own cunning." ²⁰ And again: "Jehovah knows that the reasonings of the wise men are futile." ²¹ So let no one boast in men(human leaders); for all things belong to you, ²² whether Paul or A-pol'los or Ce'phas or the world or life or death or things now here or things to come, all things belong to you; ²³ in turn you belong to Christ; Christ, in turn, belongs to God.

(2 Timothy 3:16, 17) All Scripture is inspired of God and beneficial for teaching, for reproving, for setting things straight, for disciplining in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be fully competent, completely equipped for every good work.

Having the Bible means that you are "*completely equipped*". You don't need men to be between you and God. Even our prayers are not to have another man between ourselves and God. Although we are to pray for others (1Th 5:25), we are not to assume the responsibility of making other's prayers for them. As a Christian you are to say your own prayers. (Lu 11:2-4)

We are to personally pray through our mediator to God. (1Tim 2:5) Another man is not to say our prayer for us. Nowhere in the Greek scriptures are we told to allow another man to say our prayers for us, nor are there any examples of it happening, for this too would be placing another person between ourselves and Jehovah. Such prayers are a tool men use to unscripturally insert themselves between you and Jehovah God.

One verse some point out to promote others saying your prayers for you is 1 Corinthians 14:16.

(1 Corinthians 14:12-19) So also with you, since you eagerly desire the gifts of the spirit, seek to abound in gifts that will build up the congregation. ¹³ Therefore, let the one who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret. ¹⁴ For if I am praying in a tongue, it is my gift of the spirit that is praying, but my mind is unproductive. ¹⁵ What is to be done, then? I will pray with the gift of the spirit, but I will also pray with my mind. I will sing praise with the gift of the spirit, but I will also sing praise with my mind. ¹⁶ Otherwise, if you offer praise with a gift of the spirit, how will the ordinary person in your midst say "Amen" to your giving of thanks, since he does not know what you are saying? ¹⁷ True, you are giving thanks in a fine way, but the other man is not being built up. ¹⁸ I thank God that I speak in more tongues than all of you do. ¹⁹ Nevertheless, in a congregation I would rather speak five words with my mind, that I might also instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue.

Although amen is said at the end of public prayers today, nowhere in the Bible is amen used at the end of a prayer where someone else has said their prayer for them. 1 Corinthians 14:16 is

talking about gifts of the spirit, like when the spirit prompted someone to speak out in a different tongue or to sing out with praise, not one person saying another's prayer for them. Even when many were gathered together, they still spoke their own prayer. (Ac 1:14; 12:5, 12; 21:5; 2Co 1:1)

If the song of praise was in a different tongue, the hearers of it that do not speak that language would have been built up by the workings of the spirit, but they would not have known what was said. But if the spirit had prompted them to sing out praise in their own language then others could've said "amen" (so be it, I agree) because they would have understood what the one under the power of the spirit was saying.

Another verse some would point to is James 5:14.

(James 5:14) Is there anyone sick among you? Let him call the elders of the congregation to him, and let them pray over him, applying oil to him in the name of Jehovah.

The original Greek word (ep), translated as "over", means "on, upon, to, against, on the basis of, at" and does not give the impression of saying another's prayer for them, but refers to having that person be the reason for your prayer, which is why other Bibles translate it as "pray for". As Paul reiterates in verse 16: "pray for one another, so that you may be healed."

What about Matthew 6:9-13? Does Jesus describe saying other's prayers for them there? No. You can see the model prayer in two ways. He is speaking to a group of men, so he speaks in a manner that answers them as a group. And he also is telling them to pray, not just for themselves, but to also have others interests included in their prayers. Note that he did not give an example of assuming to speak for another, such as 'we thank you', or 'we request...'.

We may pray aloud, giving others the opportunity to agree (say amen), but saying other's prayers for them is being presumptuous. Not all listening may agree with what you are praying. How would God receive a prayer from you that inaccurately assumes the desires of others?

Now Paul recommends that we continue to meet together, but for what purpose?

(Hebrews 10:24, 25) And let us consider one another so as to incite to love and fine works,²⁵ not forsaking our meeting together, as some have the custom, but encouraging one another, and all the more so as you see the day drawing near.

That's right, to incite to love and fine works, and to encourage one another. (Ro 1:12; 1Th 5:11) Not to be directed by a man, or group of men, who tell you what to think and how to worship and say your prayers for you. (Mt 21:13)

Although new ones need to be taught the good news (Jn 21:15-17), it is not the job of those taking the lead to be directing mature Christians. (Mt 20:25, 26) (see my articles "Feed My Lambs" and "Do Not")

(Matthew 23:8) But you, do not you be called Rabbi, for one is your Teacher, and all of you are

brothers.

(2 Corinthians 1:24) Not that we are the masters over your faith, but we are fellow workers for your joy, for it is by your faith that you are standing.

If you give any man status and position, he begins to like it, and soon wants more. It is the nature of man. People like that feeling they get when others do what they say and agree with them and tell them they are right. It makes them feel smarter than others, superior to them. They desire their affirmation and endorsement. But that position brings a heavier judgment. (Jas 3:1; Isa 3:14a)

The other side of that coin is that people don't want to be thought of as dumb or wrong, which is why they don't like condemnation, fault, guilt, or blame. One common way used to try to avoid all of that is to try and place their responsibility for themselves onto others.

People reckon that if they think and act the way others tell them to then they can't be held responsible for believing or doing anything wrong. But that is a wrong action in itself, and they will reap what they sow. (Mt 15:14) You are responsible for yourself. Being a follower of men does not remove that responsibility.

(Colossians 3:23) Whatever you are doing, work at it whole-souled as for Jehovah, and not for men,

What will happen to those men who have made many false prophecies, and should we fear what they say and do?

(Deuteronomy 18:20-22) "If any prophet presumptuously speaks a word in my name that I did not command him to speak or speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet must die." ²¹ However, you may say in your heart: "How will we know that Jehovah has not spoken the word?" ²² When the prophet speaks in the name of Jehovah and the word is not fulfilled or does not come true, then Jehovah did not speak that word. The prophet spoke it presumptuously. You should not fear him.'

No, you should not fear their future predictions or any of their words that condemn you for not continuing to follow their directions. Their future is laid out in verse 20.

(2 Peter 2:1-3) However, there also came to be false prophets among the people, as there will also be false teachers among you. These will quietly bring in destructive sects, and they will even disown the owner who bought them, bringing speedy destruction upon themselves. ² Furthermore, many will follow their brazen conduct, and because of them the way of the truth will be spoken of abusively. ³ Also, they will greedily exploit you with counterfeit words. But their judgment, decided long ago, is not moving slowly, and their destruction is not sleeping.

There will be "*false prophets*" and "*false teachers*". It will be up to us individually to decide whether or not to "*follow their brazen conduct*". And what is that "*brazen conduct*"? Answer: Their assuming the role of religious leader and mediator, which belongs exclusively to Christ. (Mt 23:10; 1Ti 2:5) Of course they will look and act like righteous men as they do it.

(Matthew 7:15) "Be on the watch for the false prophets who come to you in sheep's covering, but inside they are ravenous wolves.

Yes, they hunger for that role, they fight for it, they will attack you to protect it, just like a wolf will to keep the prey it has captured.

How do they get people to follow them when Christ clearly tells us to follow only him? They do it the same way a predator kidnaps a child right in front of their school. The mother tells the small child not to trust strangers. So the predator tells the child: "Your mom sent me to pick you up."

Yes, the predator claims to come in the name of the child's mother.

Men do the same thing to draw followers after themselves. They claim to come in the name of Christ.

(Matthew 24:5) for many will come on the basis of my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will mislead many.

(Mark 13:6) Many will come on the basis of my name, saying, 'I am he,' and will mislead many.

(Luke 21:8) He said: "Look out that you are not misled, for many will come on the basis of my name, saying, 'I am he,' and, 'The due time is near.' Do not go after them.

How can they come on the basis of his name, and yet claim to be him at the same time? Because they are not saying that they are the Christ. They only claim to be filling the position of Christ, just as the scribes and the Pharisees claimed the position of Moses. (Mt 23:2). And what is the position of Christ? "*Mediator between God and men.*" (1Ti 2:5) (see my article "Leaven")

And how do they come on the basis of his name? By claiming to be his representative. By claiming to be the only channel to gain his approval and obtain proper interpretation of his word. By claiming to be his earthly organization.

Remember, it is because of those who follow such men that the truth is spoken of abusively. (2Pe 2:2) Those men have stolen Christ's sheep just as the predator has snatched the small unsuspecting child, which then develops Stockholm syndrome.

They also point to their deeds and accomplishments to get men to follow them.

(Matthew 24:24) For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will perform great signs and wonders so as to mislead, if possible, even the chosen ones.

(Mark 13:22, 23) "For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will perform signs and wonders to lead astray, if possible, the chosen ones. ²³ You, then, watch out. I have told you all things beforehand.

They have deceived millions into believing that they are true prophets of Christ by performing "*great signs and wonders*". And they "*come on the basis of (his) name*" too, so why wouldn't people believe them?

Are the powerful works they perform fake, or trickery?

(Matthew 7:22, 23) Many will say to me in that day: 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and expel demons in your name, and perform many powerful works in your name?' ²³ And then I will declare to them: '**I never knew you!** Get away from me, you workers of lawlessness!'

No, Christ does not deny their works. They are not fake or trickery. They truly do perform many powerful and good works in his name, but Jesus still tells them "*I never knew you.*" Why does he say "*never*" to those "*in that day*"? Because from their very beginning they were "*false Christs and false prophets.*" (Mt 24:24) Or as Luke 21:8 puts it, they falsely say '*I am he,*' and falsely prophecy that '*the due time is near.*'

So with their coming in his name, claiming to be his representatives, and performing many powerful works, it is no wonder that many follow after those men. But remember what 2 Peter 2:2 says, that it is because of those who follow such men that the truth is spoken of abusively. Those men have stolen Christ's sheep just as the predator has snatched the small unsuspecting child.

Have you learned the lesson not to be a follower of men?

What do *you* think?

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Last edited 04-22-2025 (date created 04-19-2023) (mm-dd-yyyy)