

Believing What One Wants to Believe Is Not True Faith

‘A woman visited a psychiatrist and said, “You’ve got to come help my husband. He has delusions and thinks he’s an elevator”. “Bring him in to see me”, replied the psychiatrist, “and I’ll try to straighten him out”. “Oh, I can’t do that”, answered the wife. “He’s an express elevator, and he doesn’t stop on your floor”.’

What?! Seems that both husband and wife are certifiable!! But consider this: ‘Today, [a few thousand] people belong to the International Flat Earth Research Society of America [, better known as the “Flat Earth Society”, which has over 200,000 followers on Facebook]. Their [past] president, Charles K. Johnson [, deceased in 2001, said], “I’ve been a flat-earth-er all my life. When I saw the globe in grade school, I didn’t accept it. To me, it was illogical”.’ I trust that none of you here are “closet flat-earth-ers”. In case you are wondering, they conceive of the earth as a flat disk, with the north pole in the center, and the “continent” of Antarctica forming a wall of ice, at least 150 feet tall, all around the outside, making it impossible for anyone to “fall” off the edge. The sun, moon, planets and stars move about on a dome-shaped “firmament” over the flat earth. They claim that not only have their theories never been disproven, but that a spherical earth has never conclusively been proven either. Many of them base their

views on a literal interpretation of some Bible verses, and are otherwise firm and devout Christians. Which, unfortunately, tends to give Christianity a bad name, a reputation that believers are not properly educated, or they're simply ignorant at best.

Why all this now? Look at today's Gospel lesson from John 10. It records yet another confrontation between Lord Jesus and the Pharisees. In the encounter, the Pharisees demanded that the Lord state plainly, using their words, that He was the Messiah, therefore, ostensibly, the Son of God. The Lord, much like some bold and occasionally renegade politicians of today, refused to take their bait, but answered in His Own way. The Pharisees did not believe His answers. In fact, it would not have mattered what He said, or what words He chose. They would not have believed anything He said or did. They were all afflicted with Jesus derangement syndrome. For nearly all of them, it was all but impossible to believe what Lord Jesus was both showing and telling them. Though the facts laid bare in front of them, the signs and miracles proving His identity proliferating all around, they would not let any facts dissuade them from their convictions that Lord Jesus could not possibly be the promised Messiah because He did not check all of the boxes on their qualification list, determined by their narrow, biased interpretation of some of the Bible's prophecies. It wasn't just a "derangement syndrome", it was truly willful blindness. Refusing to open their eyes to the truth, the facts right under their noses, they could maintain their "unassail-

able” Bible interpretation, proving to themselves and the public, that they are the ones who know better than anyone else. They are the ones to whom everyone else must listen to and obey.

I’ve mentioned some time ago how well educated the Pharisees were. So too, the Sadducees. Indeed the whole Sanhedrin ruling council of the Jews. Their head knowledge was unquestionably awesome. To serve on the council meant each had memorized the entire Torah, and unfailingly adhered to a strict regimen and discipline of all the Torah commandments, priding themselves to observing the most minuscule, detailed interpretations of how to obey God’s commands. Perhaps their highest priority was determining how to observe the Sabbath, in the most perfect ways possible. Reading the Gospels, we see in their passion to observe the Sabbath, as well as tithing, in microscopic detail, that they not only forgot the whole purpose and spirit of the commandments, but ended up burdening the people with a set of rules and regulations worthy of the IRS. Their “red tape” bound and tied up the people such that no one could obey every dictate. Not even themselves. But since they themselves were the ones who had dreamt up these outrageous, senseless interpretations, they were somehow “excused”, “exempted” when they couldn’t live up to their own rules. “Rules for thee, but not for me!”

So convinced of the infallibility of their understandings of the coming Messiah, that when He did show up, not only couldn’t they recognize Him, but they sought, eventually successfully, to kill this

“imposter”, this “false messiah”, to prevent Him from leading the people astray. Though they tried to stone Him to death at this very juncture, justified in the own minds to do so, it was not God’s timing. And Lord Jesus simply walked out through the crowd and went on to the River Jordan. They’d picked up their rocks, but suddenly they could see Him no more. “Shucks! He got away!!”

The lesson we learn from them should be clear. Particularly so when compared to the record in Acts of Paul’s trial before the Roman governor Festus and the Jewish King Agrippa. Apostle Paul, in presenting his defense, painstakingly went through many, by no means all, of the Bible prophecies regarding the Messiah, and clinically proved beyond any reasonable doubt, that Lord Jesus was indeed the coming Messiah, the Christ, and though they hadn’t recognized Him while He was still physically with them, they could even now accept Him and, in the words of the king, become “Christians”. We’re not told if King Agrippa ever did finally surrender to the evidence and become a believer, but it would not have been implausible. We do know that many high-ranking individuals and families eventually did become Christians as they supported the early church and the missionary efforts of Paul, Barnabas, and the other apostles.

Taking the Pharisees as an example, from one perspective they were “blameless” and commendable. They did take very seriously the Bible, and based their faith on their own group’s interpretations, biased though it was. However, we know that despite

this, there were some who opened their eyes to countenance the extremely rare possibility that they might be wrong, and who then came to believe. The Bible records for us Joseph of Arimathea, and Nicodemus, who boldly, reputations be damned, publicly “outed” themselves at the highest levels, revealed themselves to be followers and believers in Lord Jesus. Though these two men were, hitherto, respected and esteemed members of the Sanhedrin, and believed what they wanted to believe, that is, the “politically-correct” version of faith, the accepted “narrative” of devotion holding sway then in the corridors of power, they came to realize by their own questioning and humility in the face of contrary evidence presented by the Christ, that they were wrong, and needed to accept the new revelations and teachings coming to them from the very Man Who had thrown monkey wrenches into the whole “perfect” construct of accepted and respectable faith.

Their status-quo faith, the “preferred” faith, was dead. Christ Jesus said it Himself, in no uncertain terms, when He castigated the Pharisees and Sadducees for their “hard heartedness”, saying they were just like white-washed tombs, beautiful on the outsides but inside were full of dead men’s bones, vileness and impurity.

This is where we find ourselves today. Today’s “preferred” narratives, the leftist, progressive smokescreen of inconceivable, genuinely illogical, fantastical, preposterous insanity, is finally beginning to come apart at the seams. The lies coming at us should force us, blessedly, to seriously reconsider what we believe and

know as the truth. The more we read the Scriptures, the more we immerse ourselves in them, the more we let them “percolate” within us, the more “inoculated”, “vaccinated” we’ll be as we daily face the world’s lies. We’ll be better and better able to sense when lies and half-truths are being peddled for us to consume, seeing them for what they are, able to reject them out of hand, being able then to, with a little diligent research, ferret out the truth about the people, issues and circumstances all around us.

No, all religions are not the same. There’s only way to God and eternal life, and that is Christ Jesus. No, we can not gain His favor by doing good deeds. We can only give Him our lives, die to ourselves and be reborn in Him. No, we can not live by ourselves, for as soon as we try to do anything or think anything apart from God’s word, we, by definition, have opened the door to the devil and his influence in our lives. Holy Spirit tells us, never to dabble in any occult practices, no horoscopes, no innocuous-sounding spiritual prayers, no “good deeds” of any kind associated with non-Biblical, non-truly Christian groups. We are to be holy, as God is holy, as He commanded. We are to be separate, and not defile ourselves with the world. In so doing, our lights will ignite and shine brighter and brighter as this world, in these end times, grows darker and darker. Sure, most of us are getting older and older. Such is the fact of physical life. But our crowning glory is to become even more evidently faithful to the very end. That is how we are blessed and become blessings to others!

