

Fulton County Gospel News

Good News About Christ And His Church For All Of The World

“... Christ is the head of the church: and He is the Savior of the body.” - Ephesians 5:23

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COMPELLED TO BLASPHEME

by Lee Moses

In speaking of his former sinful life prior to his conversion, the apostle Paul shamefully noted some of the atrocities which he, as a person of authority among the Jews, had committed against Christians (Acts 26:9-11). He had imprisoned them, he had participated in putting them to death, and he had punished them often in all the synagogues. These atrocities build up to something even worse: Paul had “*compelled them to blaspheme*” (v. 11).

What was the exact nature of this blasphemy is uncertain. The meaning of “to blaspheme” is “to speak in a disrespectful way that demeans, denigrates, maligns.”¹ As Paul was seeking “*to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth,*” it was against Jesus himself that he was compelling Christians to speak in this disrespectful, demeaning, denigrating, and malign manner. Whether Paul was successful in making any Christians blaspheme is uncertain. The language leaves room for the possibility that they all held “*fast the profession of our faith without wavering*” (Hebrews 10:23). But the language also indicates that Paul used force in his efforts to compel them to blaspheme. This force obviously included the threat of death. Unfortunately, it oftentimes does not require much force at all to

“compel” many professing Christians today to blaspheme the name of the Lord.

All have heard the vain and degrading ways that the name of the Lord has come to be used. “Oh, my God!” is no longer a distressed plea to the Father, but a mere expression of surprise in which the speaker has no thought of God whatsoever to cross his mind. Some claiming Christianity will attach the name of God to a curse word, thus linking to defilement the One who is “*of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity*” (Habakkuk 1:13). Many mock the holy names of God the Father and of the Lord Jesus Christ by twisting them into such derisive appellations as “Lordy,” “Gosh,” and “Jeez.”

Some may attempt to justify such breaches of reverence on the basis that the speaker “does not mean anything by what he says.” This, dear reader, is the precise problem. To use the name of the Lord without meaning anything is impossible, because the name of the Lord **means something**. God told Moses, “*Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations*” (Exodus 3:15). It

was by the Lord’s name that He was to be remembered and worshipped. It was not to be a meaningless word applicable to manifold uses. “*That men may know that thou, whose name **alone** is JEHOVAH, art the most high over all the earth*” (Psalm 83:18, emphasis added). The name of God belongs to God alone – it is not to be given to another person, nor to another person’s situational vocabulary. God Himself said, “*I am the Lord: that is **my** name: and my glory will I not give to another*” (Isaiah 42:8, emphasis added). Yet some would endeavor to take from the Lord His name and His glory in one fell swoop.

The Lord has never taken such misuse of His name lightly. The third commandment stated, “*Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain*” (Exodus 20:7). And indeed under the old covenant such blasphemers were not held guiltless. The Lord commanded Moses, “*And he that blasphemeth the name of the Lord, he shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him: as well the stranger, as he that is born in the land, when he blasphemeth the name of the Lord, shall be put to death*” (Leviticus 24:16). Immediately after receiving this instruction, the Israelites carried out this very punishment against a blasphemer (vv. 11, 23).

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Blasphemy did not suddenly become pleasing or acceptable to God under the new covenant. Blasphemy is one of the traits a person completely “puts off” when he “puts on” the new man of Christianity (Colossians 3:8). The apostle Paul acknowledged that before his conversion he had been “injurious” and “chief of sinners” when he had been a blasphemer, and in need of mercy (1 Timothy 1:13-15). The book of Revelation does not portray blasphemy as a practice of Christians, but of a “beast” (Roman emperor, 13:1, 5-6), of recipients of God’s severe wrath (16:9,11,21), and of “the great harlot” (Rome, 17:3).

What is it that “compels” a professing Christian to blaspheme? It is not love of the Lord. It is not an understanding of His will conjoined with a strong desire to please Him. But these are the things which compel the true Christian to live the life that he

does. While many early Christians were “compelled to blaspheme,” there was a stronger force compelling them not to blaspheme. Many resisted even the threat of death to avoid blaspheming the name of the Lord: “*And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death*” (Revelation 12:11). Instead of allowing the hot flame of temper or the rolling waves of emotion to compel him to

blaspheme, the Christian will allow the worthy name of the Lord to compel him to see it held in the highest regard.

“Let them praise the name of the Lord: for his name alone is excellent; his glory is above the earth and heaven” (Psalm 148:13).

1. Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich, **A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature**, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Univ. Of Chicago Press, 2000), pp. 177-178.

IS GOD RESPONSIBLE FOR MY PROBLEMS?

by Gary W. Summers

Periodically, over a few weeks’ time [in 1995], *Parade Magazine* has published responses of young people to the question, “Do you believe in God?” Much of the thinking has been quite superficial and insubstantial, whether the person believed or disbelieved. The truly disturbing thing about many of the responses is that created beings seem to think they have the right to sit in judgment on the Creator.

Consider what an 18-year-old girl from Riverdale, New Jersey, writes. “I was taught that God was the Almighty and was good, but the past few months have set me straight. There is no God. At least not the God everyone is talking about. If He/She was real, then there wouldn’t be so much disease, death, hurt and heartbreak in the world.

“In December, one of my friends lost her mother. In January, a friend was killed on his way to school. In April, a friend of the family lost his long battle with

AIDS. And in May, one of my best friends also lost her mother. What God would do this to anyone? None that I know of or believe in.” [This scathing denunciation of God appeared on page 23 of the October 15th 1995, issue].

What an outburst of unrighteous indignation! Her philosophy of God may be summarized as follows: 1) God does not run the world the way I think He/She should; 2) Therefore, God does not exist. How arrogant for one merely eighteen years of age to think that she has disproved God’s existence based on so few observations! Those who have watched their loved ones be killed in Nazi death camps (with much greater reason to doubt God’s benevolence) have emerged with a strong faith in God while she has barely become acquainted with life’s tragedies.

She is obviously even less acquainted with the Word of God, to which one goes to find reality and truth. A study of some fundamental matters might be of

some help to those who feel as this young girl does. Some crucial doctrines follow.

God Is Almighty

The Scriptures affirm this truth in a number of passages, but it is the inference some draw from this fact that is erroneous. Many think that since God is Almighty, He will control everything that happens, but such is not the case—yet. When God created man, He gave us “free will.” We may choose to obey or disobey Him. If we choose the latter option, many evil things will result. Suppose, despite all of the warnings against the dangers of drinking and driving someone goes ahead and does so. If he loses control of the vehicle and crashes into a tree and is killed, whose fault is it? If God prohibits harm, there is no free will; if He allows free will, tragedies will abound. God does not stop people from bearing the consequences of their actions.

God Is Good

God created a perfect world in which man could dwell, but we exercised our free will in a negative way and allowed sin to enter Paradise. Man could not be man without this possibility. We either must be robots, programmed to always do right, or we can enjoy freedom (recognizing that such a privilege means we bear the consequences of our actions). Unfortunately, when a person chooses to sin, innocent people usually suffer, also. The drinking driver, for example, may not simply hit a tree and kill himself; he may suddenly swerve across the center line and kill a family of innocent people. Does God cease to be good because He does not intervene in the natural course of daily events?

Certainly, we are tempted to think so—especially if the victims were our family. But God cannot be blamed for man’s decisions. The person who acted irresponsibly is the one who is at fault. God is doubly good in that He not only created us—He recreates all who obey the gospel. He allowed Jesus to die on the cross for our sins so that we could be redeemed from the consequences of our own actions. Accepting the salvation He offers through repentance and baptism (Acts 2:38) enables us to triumph even over death.

Why Disease?

God’s gender, despite the feminist influence, is not a mystery. The student of the Bible realizes that God is not He/She, but He. We pray to “our Father” (Matthew 6:9). The female respondent needs to spend some time in the Book to learn about the One she apparently hates so much.

Why do disease, death, hurt, and heartbreak dominate this world? There is an answer for each of the things—*SIN!!* God did not sin; man sins. Because we have chosen to disregard God’s commandments and principles, all these things plague us. Why does AIDS exist, for example? Did it come about by mankind being morally pure? No, it developed because of man’s perversions of sex—the practice of bestiality, homosexuality, fornication, and adultery. All of these are denied in the Holy Scriptures as violations of God’s holy law, but mankind has repeatedly rejected these teachings because he would rather satisfy unlawful lusts. As is usually the case with sin, innocent people have

suffered for a no more sinister reason than that they needed a blood transfusion (through which they contacted the AIDS virus). But most contracted and suffer from AIDS because they chose to disregard the warnings, just as cigarette smokers indulge themselves—although they are fully aware of the suffering they will one day face.

Man’s dilemma is that he wants to sin without facing the consequences of his actions. *“Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting”* (Galatians 6:7-8). We tell children that fire burns. If they choose to handle it, they will suffer for their poor judgment. God likewise warns against what will burn us spiritually. If we choose to ignore the truth, does that make God evil?

“What God Would Do This To Anyone?”

This statement is biased enough almost to be laughable. The youth who wrote it apparently pictures God as a capricious individual who takes delight in finding unsuspecting souls to inflict with pain. God is a God of comfort (2 Corinthians 1:3-4) and a help (Psalm 46:1). Satan is the adversary (Job 1-2). No reason is assigned for the loss of either friend’s mother, nor is it explained why a student was killed on the way to school. But without knowing the details, there can be no doubt that the cause was sin. Somewhere Satan is laughing at all the hurt which people experience;

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he probably doubles over and rolls in the aisles when mankind then tries to pin the blame on God instead of him and themselves. Do we mistakenly think that if everything always went well, everyone would love and serve God? What happened in the garden of Eden disproves that faulty notion. Many live tragedy-free lives and do not believe in God. Why not concentrate on the things that God had done for us and ask ourselves, “Why has God done all this for me?”

CORRECTIONS

Last month’s issue of the **Fulton County Gospel News** included an short piece entitled, “Ten Things We Will Never Regret.” There were good thoughts conveyed in each point. However, after the issue had gone to press and had been mailed out, I realized that a couple of the points could have been better phrased so as not to be misleading.

Point #3 could have been better worded, “Offering a **sincere** apology that will save a friendship.” Truthfulness is always commanded by Scripture. To lie, even for such a good cause as saving a friendship, is to disobey God – and thus to be greatly regretted.

Point #5 could have been better stated, “Helping a boy or girl find themselves [sic] **in relationship to the Lord.**” The concept of “finding oneself” in modern-day usage is very subjective and selfish – and it is also meaningless if God is not included in the equation (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

Point #9 could have been better stated, “Living according to our convictions, **as long as they are in harmony with the will of God.**” The apostle Paul, the former Saul of Tarsus,

was able to say confidently, “*I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day*” (Acts 23:1). But how did he live “*in all good conscience*” (or, “according to his convictions”)? “*I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth*” (26:9). Certainly, he rightfully came to regret acting contrary to the Lord, even though it had always been according to his personal convictions.

Such points as these may seem “nitpicky,” but we want to do our best to be sure that the readers of the **Fulton County Gospel News** are never left with a false impression. [Lee Moses]

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GOD’S PLAN OF SALVATION

1. Hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17; Acts 16:32).
2. Believing what is taught (Mark 16:16; Hebrews 11:6).
3. Repentance (Acts 2:38; Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30).
4. Confession (Romans 10:9, 10; Acts 8:37).
5. Baptism (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; I Peter 3:21; Romans 6:3, 4).
6. After the above five steps, faithful Christian Living (I Peter 2:11, 12; Revelation 2:10).

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

1. The Bible is its only guide (Romans 1:16; I Thess. 2:13).
2. Wears a Biblical Name (Romans 16:16).
3. Established at the right place (Isaiah 2:2, 3; Acts 2).
4. Established at the right time (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2).
5. Established on the right person (Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:36).
6. Saved are in it (Ephesians 5:23; Acts 2:47).
7. Its members are enrolled in heaven (Hebrews 12:23).
8. Membership in it is obtained by obedience to God’s commands including baptism (Acts 2:41-47; I Corinthians 12:13).

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