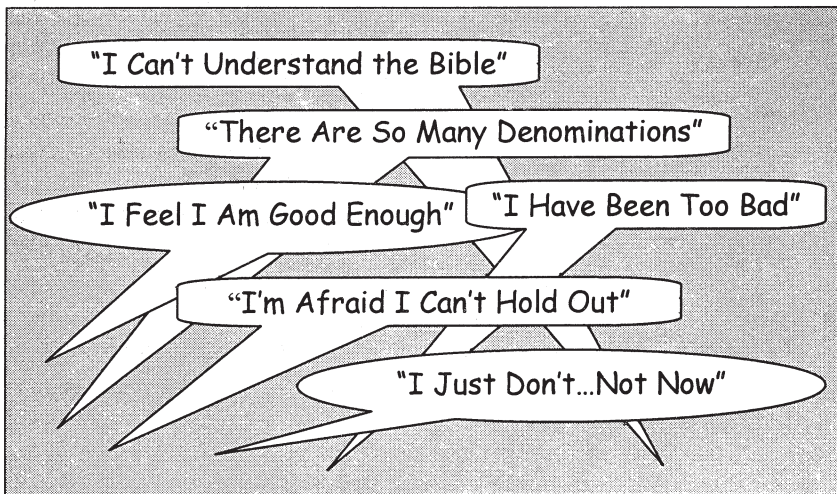


EXCUSES ANSWERED



THERE ARE two parables Jesus gave that seem to deal with making excuses in one way or another. In the first one (Matthew 22:1-13), the king invites people to the wedding feast of his son. Those invited make light of it and turn the invitation down. They spitefully treat the servants of the king who brought the invitation and even kill them. The king has the murderers and their city destroyed. Servants are sent out again and the marriage celebration is filled with guests. Then an extended application is made in this parable as one is found in attendance without having on the proper wedding garment. He was cast into outer darkness and there was "weeping and gnashing of teeth."

The second parable is recorded in Luke 14:15-24. Here a certain rich man provided "a great supper, and bade many." Their response is one of indifference, and apparent disrespect, as they are all wrapped up in their own personal affairs. They turned down the privileged invitation that had been extended to them by making excuses. Therewith the invitation was thrown open to all, "the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind." Those that were "bidden" and would not and did not come would have no part in the supper.

The book of Revelation ends with a great invitation. "And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely" (Revelations 22:17). This follows reference to the heavenly city that John saw coming down and the marriage supper of the Lamb. There is an invitation open to all. It involves salvation and our eternal well-being.

It seems highly unreasonable, and actually foolish, that people would turn down such a generous invitation. All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). All must die and face the judgment seat (Hebrews 9:27). All need a Savior. How we respond to Christ and this invitation will determine our eternal destiny, whether it will be in heaven or hell. It is just that simple.

In this article we would like to notice some common excuses made by many today as to why they have not responded to the gospel invitation. It may be that you are in this category and need to consider what we have to say. Read on. This wonderful invitation is open to all.

I. "I CAN'T UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE"

What Should Bother Us

Many today make excuse, saying, "I can't understand the Bible." Let us say that no one completely understands all of the Bible. There are some things that we will probably never be able to fully understand until that great and final day (like, some prophecy). But all things that are essential to our salvation are plain enough. Mark Twain, that great American humorist, said a great truth, which he meant to be sarcasm coming from him as an unbeliever, but it is more than contemptible wit. He reportedly said that it wasn't what he didn't understand about the Bible that bothered him, but it was what he did understand.

The Things We Understand

Yes, the things we do understand should bother every one of us. We understand there is an Almighty God. We understand that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, that we need a Savior. We understand that Christ died for our sins, that he was raised from the dead. We understand there is an eternal heaven for the saved and a corresponding place for the lost. We understand that the Bible says there is no hope unless we accept and obey Christ. It is not hard to recognize these truths, is it? In the most elementary language, the Bible is plain on these matters. The big question is, really, how we are going to respond to these truths.

Not Required to Know It All

Although it is desirable to know all that we can before accepting Christ, especially enough to count the cost (Luke 14:27-33), it is not required of us to understand all of the Bible to become a Christian. The Bible makes this clear enough. In the 2nd chapter of Acts, the people on the day of Pentecost upon hearing one gospel sermon wanted to know what they must do. The same day about 3000 became Christians as they were baptized into Christ (Acts 2:36-41; Galatians 3:27). They did have a Jewish background, but they understood very little of God's plan involving Christ. They were aware that they were lost and needed their sins taken care of. The pagan Philippian jailor in the 16th chapter of Acts knew very little about Christianity (Acts 16:30-34), except that Jesus was the Savior and that he was a lost man. There was much to learn. After all, the great commission said, "Teaching

them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded..." (Matthew 28:20), and this came after baptism.

Grow in Grace and Knowledge

The truth of the matter is that we become Christians through a simple trust and an obedient faith as we surrender our all to Christ. (He "is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption," 1 Corinthians 1:30; 2 Corinthians 5:21). Becoming a Christian involves being born of the water and the Spirit (John 3:5), which takes place when we repent and are buried with Christ in baptism to be raised to walk in newness of life (Acts 2:38; 1 Corinthians 6:11; Romans 6:1-6). We are born as babes into the kingdom, and then we grow in grace and knowledge of all the wonderful things in Christianity (1 Peter 2:1-3; 2 Peter 1:3-10).

II. "THERE ARE SO MANY DENOMINATIONS"

A Legitimate Excuse

Another excuse that we have heard, which comes closer to being a reason, is, "There are so many denominations." And this represents a real problem. Jesus prayed the night before his crucifixion, "Neither pray I for these alone [the apostles], but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (John 17:20-21). Certainly the situation today is confusing to the people of the world. There are Catholics. There are Protestants. There are old line denominations, and newer upstarts and divisions, each with their distinctive beliefs and unbeliefs; each with their traditions and doctrines. "If I profess Christianity, what should I do? Which denomination should I join?" These are legitimate questions.

Denominations Not of God

First, let us make clear, denominationalism is not of God. Denominationalism means division, and division means denominationalism. Christ said, "I will build my church" (Matthew 16:18). He said there would be "one fold," even as there was "one shepherd" (John 10:16). The apostle Paul lays out the Lord's simple plan of oneness, not denominationalism, in Ephesians 4:4-6. "There is one body [church, Colossians 1:18], and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism; One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." Disruption of this oneness and unity is sharply condemned in 1 Corinthians 1:10-13. They were saying, "I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ." Paul prodigally asks, "Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?" In 3:4, he further asks, "For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?" This is so serious that Paul went on to say, "If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye [plural] are" (3:17). So, there is no way that we can say that denominationalism is right.

Be Added to the One Church

You are not being asked to “join” a denomination. Denominations are contrary to the will of God. You are being invited to accept Christ as your Savior. He said that if we came to him, he would in “no wise cast” us out. When the church came into being in the 2nd chapter of Acts, people were convicted of their sins and cried out, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (2:37) “Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost [Spirit]. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call...Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were *added* unto them about three thousand souls” (2:38-40). The last verse of this chapter makes it plain that the Lord is the one who “added” them to the church; you don’t “join” it. It is not a denomination to be joined. We are “called in one body” (Colossians 3:15). We are “baptized into one body” (1 Corinthians 12:13). The Lord adds us to his one church.

Become a New Testament Christian

Neither we, nor does anyone else, have authority to invite you to join a denomination. The Great Commission does not allow that (Matthew 28:18-20). Accept Christ as your Savior in accordance with the Scriptures. He therewith adds you to his one church that was started in the first century, which was not and is not a denomination. Take your stand with others who have taken the same stand that you have taken, just being simple “undenominational,” New Testament Christians; just being the Lord’s church and that alone, uncluttered by denominational names, man-made doctrines and traditions of men. When you are doing what is right, you know there is no way that it can be wrong. This is right.

III. “I FEEL I AM GOOD ENOUGH”

The Awfulness of Sin

When we attempt to share the good news of the gospel with some people, their response is not all that cordial, and they come back with, “I feel I am good enough already.” They think we are personally implying that they are wicked. Obviously there is much misunderstanding. The awfulness of sin has not been realized. One sin in the Garden of Eden made the human race a dying race. The apostle Paul in Romans 6:23 tells us that “the wages of sin is death...” The word for sin here is singular. The “wages” of one sin brought and brings about death. That is how bad sin is in the sight of the Almighty God, who is sinless perfection, and who said, “Be ye holy; for I am holy” (1 Peter 1:16). And Paul, furthermore, said in Romans 3:23 that “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” That includes the writer of this article; that includes you. The sin problem is universal, as well as its consequence, “as it is appointed unto men once to die, and after this the judgment” (Hebrews 9:27). We need a Savior.

“Not by Works of Righteousness”

The purpose of the Old Testament law was to prove that man is not “good enough,” that he needed a Savior. Personally, as fallen creatures we are incapable of perfection, it would seem. The law made this glaringly evident, and got us ready for Christ. “Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith” (Galatians 3:24). Read the context. The apostle Paul plainly states in Ephesians 2:8-9, “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.” Again, in Titus 3:5-6 he writes, “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost [Spirit]; Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour.” Then 2 Corinthians 5:21 asserts this cardinal truth, “For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” To say that we are good enough already is to fly in the face of all of these Scriptures (and human experience). It is to say that Christ made a mistake in dying on the cross of Calvary; that we don’t need a Savior.

Convicted of Our Sins

When the gospel message is preached, and our hearts are open to God, we are convicted of our sins by the Holy Spirit (John 16:7-11; Hebrews 4:12; Acts 2:37). We must realize that we are wrong before we can get right. Jesus said to the Jews that “if you believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins” (John 8:24). Then he emphatically spoke in John 10:1, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber” (John 10:1). “For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God” (1 Corinthians 1:18). There is no other name under heaven whereby we must be saved (Acts 4:12). In unbelief to spurn Christ and go our own way, thinking we are good enough as we are, is but to add insult to injury. It is but to further lock ourselves into the wrong and alienate ourselves from God.

IV. “I HAVE BEEN TOO BAD”

“Amazing Grace, How Sweet the Sound”

Although most are reluctant to admit the enormity and guilt of their sins, at times we run into people who have so messed up their lives that they will unhesitatingly acknowledge it. They have forsaken the guide of their youth and have given themselves over to ungodly, abandoned living. They have made shipwreck of their lives. When approached about becoming a Christian, they shake their heads and say that they have been too bad, that the Lord would never think of forgiving and accepting them. Just like the person who thinks that he is good enough already doesn’t know how great and awful that sin is, so the person who thinks that he is too bad to become a

Christian doesn't know how great and wonderful the grace of God is. The whole point of God's relationship to man through Christ is that he wants to save us. That is why Christ came into the world (Matthew 1:21; Luke 19:10). Remember John 3:16. God loves us and has our eternal well-being in mind. It is now left up to us. How are we going to respond to that great love? Are we going to accept his grace?

People With Great Sins Forgiven

Please take note. People with great sins in the Bible were forgiven. Remember what the Lord said to the woman taken in adultery, as he forgave her. "Neither do I condemn thee; go, and sin no more" (John 8:3-11). Although God used it to bring about our salvation, can you think of anything more heinous than crucifying the very Son of God? Some of those Peter addressed on the Day of Pentecost had actually been involved with the crucifixion of Christ (Acts 2:36), and we have reason to believe that they were among those who cried out, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" And, subsequently, were among those who were baptized (Acts 2:37-41). Do these people in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 sound like "nice" sinners, as Paul makes an emphatic pronouncement about them? "Be not deceived: neither *fornicators*, nor *idolaters*, nor *adulterers*, nor *effeminate* [*those who practice homosexuality*], nor *abusers of themselves with mankind* [*those who submit to homosexual acts*], Nor *thieves*, nor *covetous*, nor *drunkards*, nor *revilers*, nor *extortioners*, shall inherit the kingdom of God." No, but notice the following verse (9:11). "And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." These sins now were past tense in their lives. They were forgiven and now were Christians. There is hope.

An Example for All

Let us cap this off with what Paul said about himself in 1 Timothy 1:15-16, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting." Paul called himself the "chief" of sinners. We know what the infant church suffered at the hands of Paul before his conversion. The mercy that he experienced in forgiveness serves as an example to all sinners for all time. There is hope. God will forgive. Your life can be turned around. With Christ as Savior, and now mediator in heaven, Hebrews 7:25 stands out in bold relief. "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." He can save to the uttermost and the "guttermost." How reassuring to read: "And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more" (Hebrews 10:17). Accept Christ as your Savior and the forgiveness he has to offer. Having done that, let us forgive ourselves and move on out in the good life now and in the world to come.

V. “I’M AFRAID I CAN’T HOLD OUT”

“Hold Out”—“Hold On”

Many people when confronted with the prospects of becoming a Christian shrink back under the cover of this negative response: “I’m afraid I can’t hold out.” Maybe they are afraid that they would make a mess of things, like so many have. And hypocrites are not unknown in church circles. But, be assured, if you really repent and turn to God, he will more than do his part to help you make a go of it in being a real Christian. If you never give up, he will never give up on you. You are not left alone to “pull your own little red wagon.” Instead of all this talk about holding out, let’s just think in terms of holding on. Yes, holding on to the “hand” that made heaven and earth. We “are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Peter 1:5). By means of faith we tap on to the power of God to keep us. It is a two sided endeavor. By faith we hold on.

The Past and the Future

When we become a Christian, two things take place, involving the past and the future. Acts 2:38 says, “Repent, and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost [Spirit].” God takes care of the past with the forgiveness of sins (“And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more,” Hebrews 10:17), and he gets us ready for the future with the gift of the Holy Spirit. Then as we grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord, the Holy Spirit pervades our lives more and more. Possessing the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit soon possesses us. We are “strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man” as Christ dwells in our hearts by faith (Ephesians 3:16-17). And, as Paul stated, “Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh” (Galatians 5:16; Romans 8:1-13). Then John sort of sums up what we are trying to get across by saying, “For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith” (1 John 5:4).

The Throne of Grace

We read in Ephesians 2:18, “For through him [Christ] we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.” What does this mean and how does it relate to what we are saying? Hebrews 4:14-16 explains it well. “Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” Access to the throne of grace enables us to stand, to persevere, and to continue on in the Christian life (Romans 5:2; 1 Peter 5:12). Subsequently, Hebrews 7:25 reads, “Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for

them.” Therefore, as we frequent the throne of grace, that is our lifeline. You can, through the grace and power of God, hold out as you hold on, even abounding in the work of the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:57-58).

A Way to Escape Promised

In closing out this point, remember 1 Corinthians 10:13 as you consider the full context, starting with verse 1. “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.” Amen. Take advantage of this.

VI. “I JUST DON’T...NOT NOW”

The “Non-Excuse” Excuse

Then, again, when some people are approached about their soul’s salvation and the need of becoming a Christian, they really are at a loss as what to say. They definitely know that it is the right thing to do, and that they indeed need a Savior. But they just mutter, “I just don’t...not now,” thus implying that someday they will take this great step. For now it is just a matter of procrastination and lack of resolve to follow through. This really is just a “non-excuse” excuse. It is a defenseless answer. Perhaps some who are reading this are at this stage in their lives.

“Now is the Day of Salvation”

Please realize the seriousness of the situation, “as it is appointed unto men once to die, and after this the judgment” (Hebrews 9:27). Salvation must be taken care of in the here and now, this side of eternity. “Now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2). We have no promise of tomorrow. James wrote, “Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away” (James 4:14). Death comes to the young and to the old. Sometimes it comes at the most unexpected time. Our soul’s salvation must be taken care of now. We must be right with God before we can die right. Eternity is at stake. Obey the Lord now and enter into the good life. □

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