

# The Failure of the Church

by Tricia Berg

I recently read an excellent (ongoing) series of news articles in The Epoch Times about the history of public education in America. The author, Alex Newman, carefully documents for the reader the methods by which a succession of individuals and groups holding ideologies that drastically disagree with those of the founding fathers of the United States have patiently and deliberately shaped our education system toward the end of achieving their ultimate goals. Believing themselves to be wiser and more powerful than the God in whom they do not believe, they've been working tirelessly for centuries to bring about their vision of a Utopian society where the grateful masses look to them for leadership as they control every detail of life.

As much as I appreciate Mr. Newman's work, I believe it's important that we also recognize another important factor that has allowed the "progress" of the agenda of those who desire to take the place of God in our society. That is the failure of the Church. My focus will be on two traditional teachings in particular, and their effects. Both of them owe thanks to the incompleteness of the reformation that began in the 1500s.

Traditions can be very unifying, and the Bible encourages obedience in matters as they are specifically spelled out. (1Cor. 11:2, 2Thess. 2:15) However, the Church body was not meant to establish traditions that do not line up with the clear teaching of the Scriptures. Traditions that misapply the Bible's teachings are not beneficial, no matter how long they've been around.

First, the concept of the church as a man-made building or worship service is firmly entrenched in the minds of most people today. But the church is neither. It is the *living* Body of Christ, composed of members of His Body who are indwelt by His Spirit—not an inanimate building, nor "confirmed" members in 501(c)3 corporations. (Eph. 5:23, Col. 1:24, 3:15, Rom. 12:5, 1Cor. 12:12, 27)

There is no such thing as "going to church"—nor leaving and returning again—contrary to the questions asked in surveys trying to estimate the number of Christians. God desires to be worshiped in truth and in spirit, by the way we live our very lives, not only by going through the scheduled motions and methods prescribed by a denomination, and not limited to any particular place or time. (John 4:19-26, Deut. 6:5, 10:12-13, 11:13-19, 30:6, Josh 22:5, Matt. 22:37, Mark 12:28-34, Luke 10:27, Hos. 6:6, Heb. 10:5-9, John 15:8-10,

13:34-35, Rom. 13:8-14; also see 1Cor. 1:10-13 and John 17:20-23 about denominations.)

To me, this isn't just semantics, because it makes a difference in our attitude and our Christian witness. Believers ARE the Church, as a whole and individually members of it, wherever we are and whatever we're doing. We ARE to gather together regularly AS the Church for many different purposes, but the Bible never refers to a man-made building or a worship service as being "church." (Heb. 10:24-27, 6:9-12, 1Cor. 5:4-5, 11:17-34, 14:26-40, 16:1-2, 2Cor. 9:1-2, Matt. 18:15-20, Col. 3:14-17) And while we're talking about misused words, "hallelujah" means "highest praise (hallelu) to God (jah)," NOT "yippee."

Second, contrary to the teaching of many, we become children of God when we personally believe the Gospel—not when some well-meaning person sprinkles us as newborns with water, not even when it's by the "right" person saying the "right" words. The idea that "babies can believe" is usually inappropriately based on the unique instance of John the Baptizer, who was *filled with the Holy Spirit from the womb*. (Luke 1:15)

We are living under the New Covenant where God is making one new man from Jew and Gentile alike. (Eph. 2:14-22, Gal. 3:28-29, Heb. 8:13, 1Cor. 11:25, Rom. 10:12-13) The Gentiles are not replacing the Jews, but rather, are becoming Jews themselves in truth and spirit, NOT according to the letter of the Old Covenant law, and NOT as converts to Judaism (Rom. 7:4-6, Jam. 2:10, Gal. 5:3-4)—but grafted in to the promises made to Israel, God's chosen people forever. (Rom. 11:17-25, Eph. 3:6, John 4:23-24, Jer. 31:31-37, Isa. 54:9-10)

To be saved in this age, under this covenant, we do not rely on the circumstances of our birth, nor on events that took place shortly thereafter. (Rom. 2:28-29, Gal. 6:15-16) Instead, we are born into God's family when we *believe in our hearts and confess with our lips*. (John 1:12-13, Rom. 10:8-10, 1Pet. 1:22-25, John 3:3-8, 1John 2:28-3:10, Rom. 8:13-14, Gal. 5:25)

We die spiritually when we sin, and are thus separated from God. (Isa. 59:1-8, Prov. 6:16-19) Then, through the working of the Holy Spirit through the Gospel, we must have become aware of the fact that we have sinned against God, and desire to accept His free gift of salvation from the penalty for our sins that we have actually committed in thought, word, action (or failure to think, say or do what we know is right—Jam. 4:17), not hypothetical sins that we might commit if we someday have the opportunity. (1Tim. 2:3-4, John 3:16-21, 2Pet. 1:9)

"The penalty for sin is death," *not* "the penalty for the sinful nature is death." (Rom. 6:23, Jam. 1:15) We all die because of Adam's sin because we all inherit his sinful nature and use it TO sin. (Rom. 5:12) In other words, we will ALL eventually exercise our free will to indulge our sinful nature, but babies have yet to do so. Children do not even possess the self-control and reasoning skills to fully understand the consequences for their actions—especially death. (Gen. 3:5-7, Deut. 1:39, Isa. 7:15-16, 1Cor. 13:11)

Who could possibly claim to know God if they think that He will send a baby (or a person who never achieves a mental state beyond that of a young child) to hell because no one baptized him or her? (Remember, they haven't had the ability or opportunity to actually commit any sins as yet—let alone know that it was even wrong.)

Wouldn't that be the works of men if anyone is saved because of a physical act we performed? Wouldn't that be "putting confidence in the flesh," as though there is something we can do to save (which is to create or impart saving faith)? (Phil. 3:3, John 6:63, Titus 3:4-8, Psa. 49:7-9)

God does not want us putting our trust in rituals, no matter how spiritual their significance. He alone saves, and He doesn't need the unsaved to do anything but to STOP fighting against Him and to humble themselves. Those who are saved are to share the Gospel and make obedient disciples who follow Christ and His commands (not believers—God does that). (Matt. 28:19-20, Rom. 10:14-16, John 15:8-17) Faith comes by hearing, which does not mean without even understanding what is heard. (Rom. 10:17) Do we preach the Gospel to foreigners in our own language and then baptize them?

And while it is not the focus of this article, baptism symbolizes the death ("by drowning") of our old sinful flesh/selves and resurrection into new life in Christ. (Rom. 6:3-4, Col. 2:12-13, 3:9-11, 2Cor. 5:17) The reason the Bible mentions that they baptized "where there was plenty of water" (John 3:23) isn't because they only used a few drops of water—they *immersed* repentant believers. Infants are not repentant (for what? Gal. 6:4-5—also see Gal. 6:1), nor have they called upon the name of the Lord to save them—they don't even know their OWN names yet. (Rom. 10:13, Acts 2:21)

John the Baptizer called out some Pharisees for coming to his baptism. They looked upon it as another superficial work (of which they were big fans) rather than the result of true repentance. (Matt. 3:7-12, Luke 3:7-14, Psa. 51:7, Acts 2:36-38) What a "hater" people might consider John today! But the Bible teaches that if a person has no respect for God, such that they go against His

ways deliberately and profusely (*proudly* even), then they do NOT believe in Him—or even if they do in some vague fashion, they don't KNOW Him. (1John 2:3-6, 3:6, Titus 1:16) We repent of rebelling against God by refusing to believe first, then He works from inside of us to clean up the rest—to transform us into Jesus' image. (Rom. 8:29, 12:2, 2Cor. 3:18, Phil. 2:12-16)

During these troubling times, we need to keep in mind that even refusing to obey for the reason that we're scared is unacceptable for God's children. (Num. 14:1-4, Deut. 1:39, Isa. 57:11) Our trust (and therefore our courage) should not be in ourselves or each other, but in God. (Deut. 31:6, Josh 1:9, 2Chron. 15:7, Psa. 27:14, 31:23-24, 118:6, 147:10-11, Heb. 13:6, 12:4, 12-14, Rom. 8:35-39, Rev. 21:7-8)

Salvation, like any gift, is free, but it's of no benefit to the intended recipient if refused or rejected (or even accepted, but later discarded or returned—that is why it's so important to put on God's armor, which is the ONLY way to hold fast to the end). (Mark 4:15-20, Eph. 2:8-10, 6:10-20, 1Thess. 5:6-8, Col. 2:16-23, Phil. 2:12-16, 3:8-21, 2Tim. 2:5-7, 4:7-8, Jam. 1:12, 5:7-11, Heb. 6:4-8, 10:26-39, Heb. 12, 1Pet. 2:11, 2Pet. 2:20-22, Luke 9:57-62, Rev. 2-3)

ALL *past* sins are forgiven, and it is expected that the born-again believer will behave as such. (2Pet. 3:9, Rom. 3:23-25) *Future* sins are forgiven and we are cleansed anew after our acknowledgment and confession to God through our intercessor, Jesus (1Tim. 2:5-6) of our sins (1John 1:7-10), which implies repentance, as clarified by the very next passage. (1John 2:1-6) The blood of Jesus' ONE sacrifice is sufficient to cleanse us from ALL sins. (Heb. 9:24-28, John 19:30) We needn't live in fear that we will not be forgiven for failing to confess something we forgot we did or weren't even aware of doing, but we neither should we take for granted that God "doesn't mind" that we choose to "walk in the old flesh" instead of "keeping in step with His Spirit," either. (Jam. 2:12, Gal. 5:13, 16, 24, Rom. 6:16, 8:13, 2:1-11)

There are NO instances of anyone in the Bible being baptized first, then believing. (Mark 16:16) There are also no instances where it is just assumed that someone believes without their own confession of faith. (Acts 8:12-13, 18:8) They all came to be baptized of their own accord after believing ("*receiving*") the message. When a household is referred to as being saved, that is because they all believed. (Acts 16:29-34)

Some (using the "wisdom of men") insist that there must have been infants and they had to have been included in the reference to the household being baptized, but I'm quite sure that those same people would deny that those

infants were included when speaking in tongues, rejoicing, serving the saints or greeting others is also described of those same households. (Acts 10:2, 44-46, 16:34, 1Cor. 16:1, Phil. 4:22)

There IS one baptism (Eph. 4:5), but that doesn't validate unbiblical baptisms (not that baptism is our assurance of salvation, but we are commanded to observe it—Matt. 28:19—first they are made disciples when they believe the Gospel—Acts 16:30-31, Mark 16:16—failure to be baptized is not listed as a reason to be condemned, only unbelief—so why would anyone deny someone the joy of their own baptism after they have genuinely received the joy of salvation?)

In fact, when Paul encountered some baptized disciples of John, he gave them the Gospel and baptized them again, now that they had heard the Good News and believed that Jesus had died for their sins and risen again. (Acts. 19:1-7) Yet, denominations today make it sound like a lack of faith for an adult to be baptized when they were “already baptized” as a baby.

Our hope of glory is Christ IN us. (Col. 1:27, Rom. 8:10-11) That is why Paul asked them if they had received the Spirit (which they had not yet, since they had not actually heard the Gospel yet, but had only heard John preparing the way for Jesus—Isa. 40:3, Matt. 3:3). Unless His Spirit is present in us, we do not belong to Him. (Rom. 8:9) However, we needn't look for “signs” like the Jews did (1Cor. 1:22-31, also 1Cor. 12:28-31)—our “proof” that we have been born again is in the fruits of the Spirit IN us. (1John 5:1-5, 11-12, 18, 20—also see the whole book of 1John.)

The references to the promise being for “you and your children” does not refer to their age, just as “far off” does not refer to location in this context, but to the Gentiles being alienated from God up until that point in time. (Acts 2:39, Eph. 2:12-13, 17) Our children remain in that relationship to us even after they grow up. Adult believers are repeatedly called “little children” in the Bible. (John 13:33, Gal. 4:19, 1John 2:1, 12, 28, 3:18, 4:4, 5:21) Jesus admonishing us to let the little children come to Him refers to His love for them—they are not a nuisance—we should “bring them to Him” by teaching them about Him. (Deut. 6:7, Matt. 19:14—can a newborn baby be “hindered” from coming to Jesus?)

Infant baptism is just another tradition that is accepted because it has been in practice for so long. What would make us think that God is any more pleased by our faulty traditions than He was with the extra-biblical traditions for which Jesus reprimanded the Pharisees and Sadducees? (Prov. 30:6, Matt. 15:8-9, Mark 7:6-9, Matt. 23, Luke 11:37-54)

This particular tradition misleads people as to what it means to be a child of God, because a long delay has been inserted between the time a person is “saved” and the time that they show the fruits of their salvation. No wonder people are confused when the wheat (believers) and the tares/weeds (world) continue to be indistinguishable from one another! (Matt. 13:24-30, 36-42, 1Cor. 14:20, 13:11, Eph. 4:11-17, Phil. 3:12-16, Col. 1:28, 4:12, Heb. 5:11-14, 1John 2:15-17)

In this erroneous practice, the “salvation” is placed before the understanding of the Gospel. It IS good to teach children about God and His ways—crucial, in fact. But no one should point to an event they don’t even remember as evidence of their salvation (and neither do children conveniently become “true believers” on our schedule, e.g. for many denominations, in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade).

What is the harm in either of these “benign” traditions? Both of these flawed teachings (“church” as a place and/or worship service, and infant baptism) completely ignore the consistent, repeated teaching that God dwells in those who truly believe (His “temple”), and His Holy Spirit bears GOOD fruit in them. (Gal. 5:13-25, 2Pet. 1:3-12, Titus 2:11-15, John 14:15-26) WE are the house of God and His sanctuary on earth, not a man-made building—God is building it Himself as He circumcises hearts. (Heb. 3:6, Eph. 2:22, Col. 2:11-14, 1Cor. 3:16-17)

If we could remember that believers ARE the Church (ALL of the time, everywhere), we might also remember that we represent to unbelievers what it looks like to be a child of God in our daily lives, not just an hour or so a week. (Jam. 1-5, Col. 3:5-17, Eph. 4:17-5:21, 2Cor. 5:17-21) Since our bodies are the temple of God, we are to behave as such, rather than giving the world grounds to condemn us as hypocrites for “talking the talk” but not “walking the walk.” (Rom. 12:1-2, 2:1-11, 1Cor. 6:15-20, 2Cor. 5:9-10, Phil. 2:12-16, 1Pet. 2:15-17, 2Cor. 6:14-7:1)

Many relaxed congregations these days, including their worldly pastors, think that the answer to the problem is to just look the other way. They say that we’re all sinners, and it would be legalism to expect anything of professed believers beyond a profession of faith (if even that). People love to have their cake (the hope of heaven) and eat it, too (keep sinning, the same as the rest of the world does), don’t they? And it’s definitely more profitable to tell people what they want to hear. (Acts 20:26-35, 2Tim. 3:1-7, 4:3-4, 2Pet. 2:1-3, 1Tim. 3:6-10, Jude 1:4, Jer. 23:21-22, 2Tim. 2:19-26, Rom. 16:18-19, Isa. 30:8-14)

Nevertheless, Jesus actually said to take the log out of our own eye *before* addressing the sins of other believers. (Matt. 7:3-5, Luke 6:40-42, 1Cor. 5:12-13) Our motive is LOVE of God and one another as we strive to maintain the purity and health of the Body of Christ. (Eph. 4:15-32, 1Cor. 5:4-8, 13:1-3, 2Cor. 5:14-15, 1Tim. 1:5, John 14:15-26, 15:8-10, 1John 2:9-11, 3:14-18, 5:3, 2Thess. 3:5, Heb. 12:14-17, 1Pet. 1:14-19)

Jesus said that we could identify those who are evil by their fruit, and He called those who are disobedient foolish. (Matt. 7:15-29, Luke 6:43-49, echoed in Jam. 1:22-25—"*be doers not only hearers of the word.*" Also see Prov. 1:7.) He also told us what happens to the foolish who should know better, but despite that, do not obey Him or prepare for His return. (Matt. 24:36-25:30, Luke 12:35-48) He compared being ready to keeping our lamps lit. (Matt. 25:3-4, 7-8, Luke 12:35) Jesus also said that the eye is the lamp of the body (so we should guard what we let in). (Matt. 6:22-24, Luke 11:33-36) Those who are waiting for Him but foolishly are not ready will be left outside the door knocking. How sad is that?! (Matt. 25:10-13) What is the opposite of foolishness? Isn't it WISDOM? From where or whom do we get wisdom again? You know.

If we really believe what Jesus said, then we'll realize that it's far more compassionate and loving to warn people than to let them remain clueless about what it will cost them eternally to have their way now. (Eph. 4:15-19, 1Thess. 4:1-8, Rev. 21:7-8) Hindsight is 20/20. NO ONE will look back and think that they would have preferred to have their own way than to have "missed out" on the "fun" of the fallen world because they chose to walk the narrow road instead. (Matt. 7:13-29)

We who are truly born-again believers know that God is the light for our path and lamp for our feet, and that wisdom begins with the fear of the Lord. (Psa. 119:105, 111:10, Eph. 5:8-17, John 3:3-8, 1:12-13, 1Pet. 1:23) We delight in being His treasured possession and don't want to "cast off His bonds." (1Pet. 2:4-5, 9-12, Mal. 3:16-18, Psa. 2:2-3, 35:27, 37:4, 73:26, 119:57-64) We don't want to be "unhitched" from the Old Testament, which helps us to understand the New. We understand that all of it finds its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus and points us to Him. (Matt. 13:52, Col. 2:17, Heb. 8:5-7, 9:23-24, 10:1)

We can be born again once (Heb. 6:4-8, Jude 1:12-13—"twice dead," "uprooted" from Jesus, "the root of Jesse"—Eph. 3:17, Rom. 11:16-22, 15:12, Isa. 5:24), but thanks be to God, most people who think they were "saved" by being baptized as a baby or perhaps by making an empty confession at some point, but never bore any fruit, were never born again and still can have the

hope of salvation. (1Pet. 1:3, 2Pet. 1:8-11, Titus 3:14, Eph. 5:9-12, 2:8-9 *including* the very next verse, Eph. 2:10)

God wants all to be saved (and so we can be sure He did not randomly predestine any to hell), but will not force anyone to believe or even obey (in this age—and seeing first, then believing is NOT faith). (1Tim. 2:3-6, 2Pet. 3:9, 15, Rom. 2:4-11, Jam. 2:13, Heb. 11:1, John 20:29) There are dire warnings for those who harden their hearts toward God and desire to go back to being a citizen of the world instead of heaven. (Luke 9:62, Heb. 11:15-16, 2Tim. 2:4-5, 4:10, 1Cor. 9:24-10:13, Phil. 3:17-21, Heb. 3:12-15, 1Pet. 2:11, 1Tim. 4:16, 2Tim. 2:24-26, Jude 1:16, 2Pet. 2:21, Heb. 6:4-12, 10:26-39)

Having *genuine concern* for the lack of fruit in our alleged Christian walk is a hopeful sign that the door is still open. People who have been forsaken by God simply do not care, and even deny His existence. Such people will even curse Him when He eventually showers His wrath on the unrepentant people of the earth. (Rev. 9:20-21, 16:9-11, Jude 1:14-19)

In any event, truth and love do not oppose one another—if they did, God would have conflict within His perfect unchanging nature, which He absolutely does not. (John 14:6, 1John 4:8, Jam. 1:17, Heb. 13:8, Mal. 3:6) The truth IS loving, and that is why we must share it. (2Cor. 5:14-15, 20-21)

The truth is that if a professed believer's fruits are bad, then that is evidence that they are either lying when they claim to believe (1John 2:4, 3:6), or perhaps they haven't even been taught what is expected of believers (1Cor. 6:19-20, Eph. 4:19-24, 1Pet. 2:1-3)—maybe they've always thought of "Jesus is Lord" being more of a saying than a reality. (1Thess. 4:1-8, 1Pet. 3:14-17, Eph. 1:15-23, Heb. 1:8, 1Tim. 6:13-16, Rev. 1:5, 19:16, Isa. 9:6-7) At best, people who confess to know God, but don't care about how their bad behavior reflects upon Him, are grieving and quenching the Holy Spirit. (Eph. 4:30, 1Thess. 5:19)

That's very risky behavior, because we must hear and heed His voice in order to receive the free gift of faith and to continue walking *by* that faith until the end, as we are repeatedly exhorted to do. (Rom. 10:17, Heb. 3:12-14, 6:11-12, Rev. 2:11, 17, 26-29, 3:5-6, 11-13, 19-22, Matt. 13:18-23, Col. 1:21-23, 2Cor. 5:7) Jesus frequently spoke to "those with ears (or an ear) to hear," and those are same people who have not hardened their hearts against God. (Matt. 11:12-15, Mark 4:8-9, 20-25, Luke 8:8, 14:34-35, Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29, 3:6, 13, 22, 13:8-10, Zech. 7:8-14, Rom. 2:5, Eph. 4:17-32)

Rather than trying to control every detail of each person's life (like the government is doing more and more, and some extremely legalistic congregations do), we need to truly know God and have ears that hear His Spirit prompting us when we have strayed from His ways. (Ecc. 12:11-14, Psa. 24:1-6, 139:23-24, 50:14-23, Isa. 30:9-11, 21, Psa. 95:7-11, Ezek. 18:21-32, 33:30-33, 1Kings 19:11-18, Jer. 6:16-17, 25:4-5, Prov. 14:12, 21:2, 2Pet. 2:20-21)

The vast majority of people today never read their Bibles, so how can they claim to know God? People say they don't have time, but they can make time for a multitude of *temporary* pursuits (many of which are self-serving and therefore are worthless wastes of time, effort and perhaps money instead of the fruitful work God has called us to do) over those that will reap meaningful, eternal benefits. (1Cor. 10:23-24, Luke 10:41-42, Matt. 25:14-30, Luke 19:11-27)

The reason we should read the Bible isn't to get a gold star on a chart, but to KNOW God. (I think that those sorts of rewards are okay for children; but personally, I think that punishing a child for not reciting a Bible verse accurately just teaches them that it's unpleasant drudgery to read the Bible instead of a privilege to be treasured.) (See Psa. 119:103.)

It can be dangerous to trust someone else to tell us what it says—more and more so every day. Most say that it's too hard to understand the Bible, but Jesus said that God reveals His truths to little children. (Matt. 11:25-26) His Spirit will give us comprehension if we bother to read what He inspired men to write for our benefit. (1Cor. 10:11, John 14:26, 16:13, 1John 2:26-29, 2Tim. 2:15, 3:12-16)

No, there won't be a quiz, but *to the one who has, more will be given*. (Matt. 13:10-17, 25:28-30, Mark 4:21-25, Luke 8:16-21, 19:24-27) In other words, the one who has a love of the word of God will be given more love for it—to *know* God is to *love* Him; the one who has taken the trouble to try to understand some of the Bible to the best of their ability will be given understanding of more of it.

The opposites of these principles also apply—the ones who do not have any love for God and His word will not be given that love, but they may instead be given over to the wicked desires of their ungrateful, unregenerated, rebellious hearts. (Rom. 1:18-32) When God is the top priority in our lives (as should be the case for ALL believers), we will lack nothing of importance. (Matt. 6:19-33, Psa.

37:1-33, 55:22, 1Pet. 5:6-11, Isa. 50:4-5, 1Cor. 1:4-9, 2Cor. 1:3-5) He IS the desire of our heart. (Matt. 6:21, Luke 12:34, Psa. 37:4)

If you have read the Bible and are still not feeling genuine love in your heart for God, then I would say look around you. Do you see all of the beautiful things He made? Is it possible that He could be any less beautiful than what He created? Aren't you in awe of Him and of what He has done? Can you even fathom how He would do such a thing as to dwell among us in a body like ours at all, let alone for the purpose of taking the punishment of OUR sin upon Himself? When you read the Bible, it's okay to jump around. Look up the related passages in both the Old and New Testaments. It's not boring to be taught by God—it's exciting!

There's a saying in the health profession—*you are what you eat*. If we choose garbage for either the food OR the media that we consume, that's what we'll acquire a taste for, and our minds, bodies, spirits and souls will waste away from malnutrition. (John 6:35-40, Matt. 6:22-23, Luke 11:34-36, Prov. 8:12-21, 32-36, Col. 3:16-17)

There's another saying in computer programming—*garbage in, garbage out*. Many people trust popular preachers and teachers to accurately present what the Bible says instead of reading it for themselves. But what if those "Christian celebrities" are manipulating the Scriptures to serve their own purposes and personal preferences? We need to at least verify what they say is sound when compared with the text of a reliable translation (as opposed to some available today that have gone off the rails). (Acts 17:11, Prov. 25:2)

This is not a popular message these days, but we're meant to continually honor God by the way we use our bodies for His glory. (1Cor. 6:18-20, Rom. 12:1) Not out of fear of retribution or in an effort to save ourselves, but because we love Him—and springing from that *genuine* love, we sincerely desire to please and honor Him in all we think, do and say. We show our respect for Him and gratitude to Him by obeying. (John 14:15-24, 1Cor. 2:9, Jam. 1:12, 2:5, 2Cor. 5:14-15) We have a lasting inheritance that is not worth trading in for the junk of this world. (Heb. 12:14-29, 10:32-39, 1Cor. 3:13-17)

If we love the decayed world and our sin more than God, we should honestly question ourselves as to whether we are born again and legitimately adopted as His children. (John 1:12-13, 3:3-8, 1John 3:1-3, 1Pet. 1:14-19, Rom. 8:9-23, 2Cor. 12:20-13:5, 1Pet. 1:3-5, 22-25, 2Pet. 1:9) Our definitions of "fun" and "freedom" should not continue to match those of unsaved people who are still walking in darkness. (John 3:19-21, 2Cor. 4:6, 6:14, 1Pet. 4:1-5, Titus

3:3-11, Eph. 4:17-24, 5:1-11, 2Pet. 1:19, 2:18-22, Rom. 16:19, 1John 1:6, Col. 1:13-14, 1Thess. 5:5-8, 1Pet. 2:9, 1John 2:15-17) God disciplines His own for our good, to help us learn and grow. (Heb. 12:1-13, Rev. 3:19, Deut. 8:5, Prov. 3:11-12)

Jesus suffered horribly and died to set us free FROM sin not TO sin. (Rom. 6, Isa. 52:13-53:12) Whoever is still enslaved to sin has obviously not been set free, yet (John 8:31-36, Rom. 8:5-13)—but it's NOT a matter of ever achieving perfection in this life, and certainly not by attempting to do so of our OWN power. We won't be truly perfect until the mortal is clothed with immortality. (2Pet. 1:3-12, Titus 2:11-15, 1Cor. 15:50-58) But we make progress. (2Pet. 1:8, 1Tim. 4:15-16)

However, if our sin doesn't grieve us as it does God, then we must not be in tune with the Holy Spirit who convicts us of our sins and leads us to repent (but today, people take antidepressants to make those heavy, unpleasant feelings go away). (Acts 2:37-46, 2Cor. 7:8-10) With practice and persistence, one can unwisely squelch the voice of the Holy Spirit. (1Tim. 4, 2Pet. 2:12-14, Prov. 28:14, Heb. 3:12-15, 4:7-16, 6:4-11—also Eph. 2.)

Prosperity preachers compound the problem by reassuring people that they're "good with God" no matter how rotten their fruit is or how long it has been that way with no growth into Christlikeness. (Eph. 4:11-32, Col. 1:27-29, 4:12, Rom. 12:2, 8:29, 13:14, 1Cor. 13:11, Gal. 5:24, 6:1, Jude 1:20-23, Jam. 1:13-16, 22-26, 2:14-26, Matt. 7:13-29, Luke 6:43-49) That's exactly what the old flesh wants to hear, and just what is needed to keep the money coming in to their "ministry." (Jude 1:11, Acts 20:26-35, 2Pet. 2, Jude 1:3-25, 2Tim. 2:19-26, 3-5, 1Tim. 6:3-19, Titus 1:15-16, Rom. 16:17-19—these "obstacles" are "stumbling blocks," which can either ensnare people in sin or cause them to put their hope in something other than saving faith in Jesus.) And tragically, "love" has been redefined as permissiveness, as we were warned in advance in the Scriptures that it would. (Jude 1:4, 12-19, 2Tim. 3:1-7, 4:3-4, 2Pet. 2:1-3) But we know that sound doctrine accords (agrees) with godliness. (1Tim. 6:3, Titus 1:1, 2Pet. 1:3, 3:11) It's a perversion of grace to make it into a license to sin. (2Pet. 2:2, 1Pet. 4:3-5)

Jesus and Paul spelled out guidelines for handling unrepentant sinners within the congregation of believers, none of which involved putting anyone in stocks or sewing a red letter to their clothing—God doesn't want us adding to His word now any more than He did when the Pharisees did it. (Prov. 30:6, Matt. 23, Rom. 14) Those explicit instructions were for the health of the Body of Christ as well as for the benefit of the sinner who needs to "wake up from their

slumber" while there's still time to remedy the lost condition of their soul. (Matt. 18:15-17, 1Cor. 5, 2Cor. 2:6-9, 1Tim. 5:20, 1Cor. 15:33-34, 1Thess. 5:5-11, Mark 13:32-37, Luke 21:34-36, Rev. 3:1-6, 16:15)

We're to *abide* in Jesus and His love by obeying Him as He obeyed His Father. (John 15:8-10) This is how we demonstrate our LOVE for Him. If not, we risk being cut off by the Father (the "Vinedresser") and burned as an unfruitful branch. (John 15:1-21) He is giving to His Son from among His own, people who LOVE, and therefore OBEY Him. (John 6:37, 10:29, 14:15-24, 17:6, 9, Rev. 19:7-9, 14, 17:14)

Jesus will not cast off anyone who comes to Him or let them be taken from His grip by external force (John 6:37, 10:29, Rom. 8:35-39—this was never meant to reassure anyone that they can feel free to "outrage the Spirit of grace" without fearing the consequences—Heb. 10:29-31). Jesus won't keep anyone against their God-given free will. He guides us by His Spirit and we choose whether to humbly submit or defiantly refuse. (John 16:13, Rom. 8:7-9, 10:3, Jam. 4:7-10, Ezek. 33:11)

Remember, people who know what God expects and disobey anyway do so because they do NOT love God—they love themselves and the world MORE than God. (John 14:24, 1John 2:15-17, Jam. 4:4-10) That's why we must examine ourselves to see if we're in the faith. (2Cor. 12:19-13:5) We're to be the salt and light, and if not, then we are *worthless* servants and risk being *thrown out and trampled*. (Matt. 5:13-16, 24:42-50, 25:11-13, 24-30, Luke 12:32-48, Col. 4:5-6, Eph. 5:15, Rev. 11:1-2, Matt. 25:2-4, 7:24, 26)

Whoever believes and yet returns to their former way of life is like a "sow who returned to wallowing in the mud after being washed" or a "dog returning to their own vomit." Do we want to return to consuming what the world has to offer after tasting heaven? I hope not! Their last state is worse than before they came to the knowledge of saving truth. (2Pet. 2:18-22, Heb. 6:4-10, 10:26-39, 1Tim. 2:1-6, 1Pet. 4:17-19, Mal. 3:13-4:3) Those who do not abide in God's love could have their "branch" broken off of Israel's "olive tree." (Rom. 11:17-25)

Those who have made false confessions of faith WILL be thrown out of the Kingdom as "bad fish" or as "weeds" who disguised themselves as "wheat." (Matt. 13:47-50, 36-43) This will be a horrific double tragedy, to be avoided at ALL costs! Both their eternal suffering and the fact that souls in hell do not praise our glorious God, who alone is worthy of ALL praise from ALL of His

creation! (Rom. 15:11, Isa. 38:18-19, 42:10, 61:11, Psa. 67:3-5, 117:1-2, 145:21, 148:1-13, Rev. 4:11)

**Listen VERY carefully!** This is NOT about living in fear due to slipping (which we all do, but we get back up)—it’s about *not testifying against* ourselves by proving ourselves to be *hypocrites*. (Did you know that the Greek word “martyr” means “witness”?) It’s revealing outwardly who we really are on the inside—spirit-indwelt, redeemed children of God, or children of the devil. (1John 3:4-10, John 8:44) The rebellious prodigal son was allowed to go, and he returned of his own accord when he came to his senses. (Luke 15:11-32, 1Cor. 15:33-34) He still knew who his father was, but he stubbornly refused to honor him. His father’s heart was severely grieved, to the point that he considered him dead.

Even if we were to compare the prodigal son to a lost sheep (although sheep don’t intentionally run away from their masters that I know of—except in the children’s animated movie, Shaun the Sheep), we have to admit that he returned willingly—he was not brought back by force, still ungrateful and unrepentant, so that he could bring dishonor upon his father’s household again. He learned his lesson, and was relieved to be accepted back into his father’s home despite having squandered his inheritance. That was to have been a future reward—now gone, forfeited for the worthless, short-lived things and experiences this fallen world has to offer.

That is similar to how Esau sold his firstborn inheritance to Jacob for a bowl of stew *because it was more important to him to gratify his immediate desires than to think of the future*. Esau made his choice and bitterly regretted it. (Heb. 12:15-17, Gen. 25:29-34) Some will enter in as through the fire, grateful, but without further reward. (1Cor. 3:12-17)

We will be judged for what we’ve done in our bodies and rewarded for our faithfulness. Nothing in this short lifetime is worth jeopardizing that eternal reward. (Rev. 21:7-8, 22:12-15, Rom. 2:6-11, Col. 3:23-25, 2Cor. 5:10, Phil. 1:27-30, 3:8-21, 1Cor. 9:24-27, Heb. 12:1-2, 2Cor. 5:9-10, Heb. 4:12-13, Rom. 14:12, Gal. 6:4-5, 1Pet. 3:14-16, Jam. 2:12, Matt. 25:14-23, Rev. 11:18)

The popular message these days is that all you need to do is to say you believe, and anything beyond that would be “works”—“the only sin is unbelief.” Well, it’s true that the only sin that will send someone to hell is unbelief, because *none of their other sins will be forgiven because of that unbelief*. (Rom. 3:23, 6:23, John 3:16-18, 36) But in a way, it’s sort of like a serial killer being sentenced

to death for only ONE of his many murders. The end result is the same, but the fact remains that he is still guilty of ALL of his crimes even though technically ONE resulted in his being put to death. (Jam. 2:10, Rom. 3:21-28, 6:20-23)

And what "god" does someone believe in if they don't even know that our God is HOLY and sees everything, such that they feel free to do as THEY please with no thought whatsoever of pleasing Him? What do they think believers will be doing for all eternity? Does God even enter into that picture? It saddens and angers me at the same time.

Make no mistake—God DOES still see the sins we commit after we've been washed clean by the blood of Jesus, but we can repent and receive forgiveness and cleansing anew from His one perfect sacrifice on our behalf. (1John 1:5-10, Jam. 1:27) Ananias and Sapphira were put to death by God for lying to the Holy Spirit. (Acts 5:1-11) Seemingly, their alleged faith in God didn't include His knowing everything? Paul said that many of the Corinthians were sick and some had even died as bodily judgment by Jesus, due to their partaking of the Lord's Supper in a manner that didn't reverence Him and His sacrifice on our behalf. (1Cor. 11:27-34)

If we refuse to repent and accept God's way rather than insisting upon our own, that is likened to "bearing thorns and thistles" (and bad fruit) rather than a productive crop that pleases and honors our Father in heaven. (John 15:1-8, Rom. 7:4-6, Heb. 6:4-8, Matt. 3:8-10, 7:13-20, 12:33-37, 13:18-23, Luke 8:11-16) We're not our own; we were purchased at a very costly price. (Isa. 50:6, 52:14, Psa. 22:14-18, Rev. 5:9-10, 1Pet. 1:15-19, 1Cor. 6:13, 20) Jesus is our Lord and we're to treat Him as such in this life, just as we will *forever*. (Rom. 14:5-11, 2Pet. 1:8-11, 3:18, Jude 1:4-7, Rev. 4:11, 1Cor. 15:27-28, Eph. 1:15-23, Psa. 2, Psa. 45, Psa. 110, Acts 2:32-36, Heb. 1, Col. 1:15-20, Rev. 6:12-17, 19:11-21)

So in summary, the enemy knows that if faith is only exercised once a week (or less)—oftentimes in a rote and ritual fashion (Mark 7:6-9)—or maybe in a way that is primarily entertaining, or for the purpose of getting something in return—(John 6:26-29)—that's not a healthy, thriving faith that will "salt" society sufficiently to prevent decay. (Mark 9:50, Luke 14:34-35, Eph. 6:10-20, 1Pet. 5:6-10, Jam. 4:4-10)

In fact, anyone who wants to *live* for Christ is branded a "Jesus freak" *as if that's a bad thing* (and that includes lukewarm "believers" criticizing zealous ones). (2Tim. 3:12-13, Matt. 5:10-16, Luke 6:22-23, 1Pet. 3:10-17, Isa. 59:15, Rev. 3:14-22, Psa. 69:9-12, John 2:13-17, Matt. 21:12-13, Mark 11:15-

17, Luke 19:45-46, Gal. 4:29, 1John 3:12) I would also add that the division of the Body of Christ into denominations did nothing to strengthen the church's witness to the world (though we can all see that Roman Catholicism declaring itself the "only true church" has never been accurate or helpful—ditto for other groups like Mormons and Jehovah Witnesses.)

Getting back to the investigative news series on education referred to at the top of this article, I have to agree with the strong case presented by Alex Newman that throughout most of the history of our country, the educational system has been intentionally contrived and gradually constructed with great patience to achieve socialist goals.

**Perhaps this would be a good place to insert that we all know and love many public school teachers who sincerely love children and are unaware of any such agenda (but those in charge are getting bolder and more obvious moment by moment). Caring, well-meaning, decent teachers are nevertheless being used by the system against both their will and good intentions.**

I would also propose that besides what is being taught (or *not* taught), the various extra-curricular activities (especially sports), are a form of juvenile "bread and circuses" like adults have to keep the masses entertained and unaware they're being used by those at the top having insatiable appetites for power and money. And there have been plenty of "celebrity idols" for young and old alike to "worship" as long as Hollywood and Nashville have been in business (not to mention the sports industry). Many (but not all) of these have been instrumental in leading people on dark paths away from the light and goodness of what is taught in the Bible. (Jam. 2:1-7, Job 32:21-22)

Just as the well-liked, but unbiblical traditions in the ("corporation") church have been around for a very long time, those parts of the "school experience" and "American life" go back many generations and are thought of not only favorably, but with extreme fondness. There are very few people in America gathering as an *unincorporated* church. (I'm including under the loose definition of "incorporated" every church owning a tax-free building, jumping through IRS hoops, etc.) Those who do operate more in the manner of the early Church are likely to be considered in the surveys about faith to be "none of the above," since they have no denominational affiliation.

In a similar way to how people feel they have to choose a "flavor" of Christianity and pick a church to "go to," the ones behind the education scene turn the question away from the matter of *whether* to send your child to public

school, to *which one*—the one with the best “programs” (and hopefully “free”), of course! This is an example of the Hegelian Dialect/“popular consensus” put into practice. It’s similar to this one that is becoming more and more familiar across our country: It’s not whether or not we need that additional green space that generates no municipal income, but instead it’s about whether everyone’s property taxes will be raised or something else more important than the unneeded green space will be cut out of the municipal budget.

Education and degrees are highly exalted in our culture. You *must* be an expert with the proper paper credentials to receive any respect at all, even in Christianity. This is in spite of how Jesus chose common men for His apostles. (Acts 4:13) Being respecters of persons has resulted in betrayal of the unearned trust received by many seminaries and their graduates, many of whom today who are now preaching a different gospel. (2Cor. 11:3-4, 1Tim. 6:3-5, 5:20-21, Gal. 1:6-10, 2:6, Luke 20:21)

Also high up on pedestals are sports and other entertainment, which is all very “Greek,” according to the Bible. Their culture, just as ours has increasingly done, placed great emphasis on the wisdom of men and on temporary, physical pleasures instead of on God’s wisdom and sovereignty as our Creator, and on lasting, spiritual matters. (Acts 17:21, 1Cor. 1:18-31, 2:6, 1Tim. 4:6-16, 6:20-21, 1John 2:15-17, Rev. 21:1-8, Psa. 111:10, Psa. 1:7, 4:7, 9:10) Outward appearances are irrelevant for the purposes of human value (1Pet. 3:3-4, 1Tim. 4:8) However, too much focusing inward on self can also be unhealthy. We need to focus on GOD. (Jam. 1:17-18, Col. 3:2)

So we can see by looking back far enough (those who ignore history are bound to repeat it) that those who are trying to bring down America as we know it are attacking on multiple, simultaneous fronts under the leadership of “the god of this world” who wants to be God. (2Cor. 4:4, Eph. 6:12, 1Pet. 5:8, Jam. 4:7, John 8:44, 1John 5:18-19, Isa. 14:12-14, Ezek. 28:11-19) But of course, the Book of Revelation teaches and warns that there will be no aspect of global civilization untouched by the dragon's insatiable desire for power and control.

What we need for such a time as this is not merely a superficial faith that relies upon a man-made schedule and appearances, but a deep, living, breathing, life-sustaining faith that can withstand the pressures of the day and persevere until Jesus returns for us. (Eph. 6:10-20) I’m not suggesting that it’s wrong to attend worship services regularly at the same place—we do need one another’s support and accountability. I’m just saying that more is needed to even slow the downhill slide of our society, let alone make ground in restoring decency and morality. More is needed to stand fast instead of caving in. Going with the

flow is so much easier in the short run, but that's not what we're called to do, and we won't be rewarded eternally for doing that.

We're called to be the light showing people the way to the Light of the World, so let's do that! (John 8:12, Matt. 5:14-16, Eph. 5:1-21, Col. 4:5-6) Imagine if we only turned on the lights in our house one night a week. Wouldn't everyone stumble around the rest of the time? Would it somehow "make up for it" when that night of turning on the lights finally got here? I think that in terms of the Church lighting up the world, we can look around ourselves and see that the answer is no.

I'm not accusing individual people that I don't even know personally of "slacking on the job," but as a whole, we are guilty of negligence. And to anyone who has been persecuting their brothers and sisters in the Lord who were trying, out of love for mankind and God, to be the light and salt (despite the opposition of those who don't want to "make waves"), now is a good time to repent of that. (Gal. 5:13-26) We were NEVER given the liberty to "undo" God's warnings for the world and for His Church.

Jesus didn't call it a blessing to be persecuted for His sake because He wanted us to be silent and go with the flow. Notice that the teachings about light and salt immediately followed the blessing. (Matt. 5:10-16) We're to expect push-back from the world, not from our own "family" (other believers). (John 15:18-21, 1John 3:13, Gal. 6:7-10) We can only be on ONE side of this battle. Choose wisely. (Josh. 24:15)

*This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles, knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation." For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is **patient** toward you, **not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.***

*But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. **Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God**, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, **be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace**. And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, **which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures**. **You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ**. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.*  
2 Peter 3:1-18

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