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BLINDED MINDS

By Harold Turner

"But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." (II Cor. 4:3-6).

The Bible continually warns us of the power and effectiveness of Satan in turning the minds of men from the truth. Satan knows well that the gospel is the power God uses to save lost men, therefore if he can turn man's mind from the truth, he keeps man from being saved. As Christians, we need to know something about the methods and ways that Satan works to keep men lost, and to cause the saved to become lost again. In II Cor. 2:11 Paul warned, "Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices." Paul indicates that by our ignorance, Satan may get the advantage of us. We need to know his devices!

There are several devices used by Satan to blind the minds of men from the truth. One of his most powerful and effective devices is deception. Satan often disguises himself in a religious form, by which he is able to deceive some. In II Cor. 11:14-15 Paul said, "For Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness . . ." There are some who refuse to believe that anything sincerely religious could be of Satan, and so, by using the disguise of religion he is able to blind their minds to the truth. He also has power to work signs and wonders by which he is able to deceive some from the truth. In II Thess. 2:9-10 Paul wrote, "Even him, whose coming is after the

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Christ Is Our Leader

By Joe Sponaugle

Many of the problems in the church today, as in times past, are attributed to a lack of leadership. But is it really due to a lack of leadership or is it due to a failure to follow our leaders? I believe Christ provides all the leadership we will ever need in this life. Whether or not we follow it is another matter. Once one begins to look upon Christ as Lord, the King of his kingdom, and the head of his body, the church, things take on new meaning and direction.

While a congregation is hindered by not having elders to oversee the local work of the church and the lives of the members, it need not be as much of a hindrance as some may think, if all those in the kingdom will accept the leadership of Christ in their lives and the work of the church. For all the elders can do is follow the dictates of Christ as revealed in His word. Some congregations with elders do not function any better than those without them, because they have not accepted the leadership of Christ. This is not to suggest that a congregation should not appoint elders when there are men who are qualified for the work, they should. But a congregation can operate reasonably well without them if the leadership of Christ is recognized.

Accepting the leadership of Christ begins with conversion to Christ. Before one will accept the leadership of Christ he must recognize that he is lost in sin and in need of a savior who will save him and lead him in the way he should go. Jeremiah stated, "Oh Jehovah, I know that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." (Jer. 10:23.) "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man but the end thereof are the ways of death." (Prov. 14:12.) These truths must not only be recognized at the

"The happy people are those who are producing something; the bored people are those who are consuming much and producing nothing."

time of conversion but must continue to be recognized throughout life. There is no time in one's life, apart from Christ, that one is smart or wise enough to guide his life. This is true in the work of the church as well as in one's personal life. When one member, or the church fails to accept the leadership of Christ, the problems we see today are the result. When Peter took his eyes off of Christ he began to sink, Matt. 14:25-33. When we take our eyes off of Christ, and the leadership he provides in his word, we begin to sink. When Peter recognized his mistake he cried out, "Lord, save me." (verse 30.) Then he was willing to accept the leadership of Christ. Some times we have to start to sink before we will recognize our need for Christ.

After Thomas put forth his finger into the nail prints of Christ's hands he then cried out, "my Lord and my God." (John 20:28.) Then Thomas accepted Christ as his Lord, and Master. The master of a slave directs the life of the slave. The master tells the slave where to go and what to do. The good slave obeys his master in all things. Therefore if we accept Christ as our Lord, he will become our Master and we will accept his leadership in all facets of our life -- home, business, work, school, worship, recreation, etc. His leadership in our life, as directed by his word, will save us many heartaches, pains, sorrows, temptations, tribulations, etc. This is not to imply we will have no problems. "But the way of the transgressor is hard." (Prov. 13:15.) Life without Christ is harder than the life with Christ as our leader. He knows the way, he knows where the trouble spots are, for he has all wisdom. He loves us and has only our best interest at heart. When we stumble and fall he supplies the grace that enables us to arise and press on to perfection. Christ is perfect (Heb. 5:9) and he gives us his perfect law of liberty (James 1:25) to guide us in all things at all times. By following his leadership we will tend to become perfect as he is (Matt. 5:48).

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FULTON COUNTY GOSPEL NEWS

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EVIL MEN LOVE DARKNESS

By W. L. Totty

In the long ago, our Lord said: "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God." (John 3:19-21.)

From time immemorial we have always recognized this principle. We are afraid to walk into a darkened area for

fear of what evil lurks there. Thieves and robbers operated in the dark, for the most part, though now they are becoming more brazen in their evil deeds. But in the day light hours, they are not so apt to practice their wicked works, lest they be apprehended and punished.

But Jesus came bringing light into the world to condemn sin. Even so, we, as followers of God, must come to the light with all our deeds in order to show that they are wrought in God.

Of course, the Lord realized that not everyone who claimed to be religious would "walk in the light as he is in the light." (1 John 1:7.) He warned that there would be some false teachers who would "come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves." (Matt. 7:15.) They come under cover of darkness, outwardly making a pretense of being something they are not.

We cannot trust every teacher in the church of the Lord, because he just might be a wolf in sheep's clothing. We must measure him by the light of God's word to see whether or not his doctrine will stand, for the apostle Paul warned that "grievous wolves would enter in among you, not sparing the flock." (Acts 20:29.)

Christians are to "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness,

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Christ Is Our Leader

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When every Christian in a congregation accepts the leadership of Christ, it will not be hard for the whole church to accept the leadership of Christ in work and worship. But if Christ is not the Lord of the individual Christian he will not be the Lord or leader of the church or kingdom.

Jesus Christ is the "King of kings and Lord of lords." (Rev. 17:14) As the King over his kingdom, he has all authority in heaven and on earth. (Matt. 28:18). He is the absolute ruler and law giver of his kingdom. God speaks through him to us. (Heb. 1:1-2). As the monarch of his kingdom he has no law except his. Thus all the doctrines, creeds and opinions of men must be excluded (Matt. 15:8-9). Christ is the truth and the way and the life of his kingdom (John 14:6). All who enter his kingdom must accept his absolute authority. Thus when Christ commands us to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15-16), we must do it. And when we fail to go, we have rejected his authority and leadership. This is why so few congregations are mission minded. Elders cannot solve this problem when the brethren reject the leadership of Christ. A congregation without an eldership can still do mission work, if it accepts the authority and leadership of Christ.

Christ commands his church to do benevolent work (Acts 6:1-6; James 1:27). When we accept Christ as our King, we will do as he commands, with or without elders. Christ provides leadership in benevolent work, both by command and example. When we follow his leadership we will do as he did. When we fail to do benevolent work we have rejected his leadership as King.

"Christ is the head of the body, the church". (Col. 1:18.) And God put all things in subjection "under his feet and gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all". (Eph. 1:22-23). As there is but one body (Eph. 4:4), Christ is head of only one church, his church (Matt. 16:18). The head of a physical body directs that body, all parts of it, without exception. "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of the body being many, are one body; so also is Christ." (1 Cor. 12:12). Christ, as the head of his church, gives instructions to all the members of his body and when all members accept his authority as head, they do as he commands. Christ does not excuse those who refuse to obey him because the congregation does not have elders. Jesus said, "If any man would come after me, Let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." (Matt. 16:24.)

All who accept Christ as Lord, King, and Head are one in Christ. They all speak the same thing and are of the same mind and judgment (1 Cor 1:10). Thus as Christ leads, they follow, as individual Christians and as members of his body, the church, and as citizens in his kingdom. Yes, we have the leadership of Christ in all facets of Christian living, work, and worship. Let us accept it at all times and not try to excuse on inactivity because we don't have elders.

"If you keep your tongue it will improve."

"Men regret their words more than they regret their silence."

but rather reprove them. For it is a shame even to speak of those things that are done in secret." (Eph. 5:11-12.) Righteousness has no fellowship with unrighteousness; light has no communion with darkness, said the apostle Paul to the Corinthians. (II Cor. 6:14.)

Yet some people in the church are prone to complain and criticize when one's evil deeds are made manifest. They think one is being too harsh when one calls names and, according to the command of God, points out the error of another. However, Jesus, our Guide and Master, whom we are commanded to follow (Matt. 4:19; 16:24; Luke 9:59), was not hesitant about scathingly rebuking those who were walking in darkness of sin. Read the 23rd chapter of Matthew and especially pay attention to verses 25 - 30. There he told the scribes and Pharisees they were "hypocrites," like "whited sepulchres." A tomb may be whitewashed and garnished on the outside to make it appear bright, cheerful and attractive, but what could be darker than a tomb on the inside? Oh yes, those scribes and Pharisees would have made out like they would not have killed the

prophets in the days of their fathers, but they were the very ones who would have done so.

A man who will not come to the light with his deeds is of the devil, just as those Pharisees and scribes were, of whom Jesus spoke. If one hides behind another and secretly prods another to accomplish evil that he wants to see done, he is none other than a hypocrite. Or when one anonymously seeks to do evil to another, he is a child of Satan, no matter how pious he pretends to be. He is merely manifesting his cowardice. He won't come to the light, lest his deeds be reprov'd.

There is nothing more obnoxious than to hear someone say, "Someone told me so and so about someone else," but then refuses to tell where the rumor started. If a man cannot or will not give the source of his information, don't believe it. All such is better left unsaid if one refuses to identify the source.

In touching a lesson on the impossibility of serving both God and Satan, Jesus said in the sermon on the mount,

"The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, th y whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, they whole body shall be full of darkness . . ." (Matt. 6:22-23.)

In the day of judgment, all the evil thoughts of the heart and deeds of man will come to light (I Cor. 4:5), and we will be judged accordingly. Then, oh what a weeping and wailing when such an one realizes his fate!

But if one is wise enough to trust in God, one need not fear the onslaughts of those who walk in darkness of sin. Solomon, who was wiser than all men, stated: "When wisdom entereth into thine heart, and knowledge is pleasant unto thy soul; Discretion shall preserve thee, understanding shall keep thee: To deliver thee from the way of the evil man, from the man that speaketh forward things; Who leave the paths of uprightness, to walk in the ways of darkness." (Prov. 2:10-13.)

Let us be up and doing the will of the Lord openly, showing ourselves to be the "light of the world."

FAITH OR TRADITION?

By Ted Mountjoy

We are hearing it said that there is nothing wrong with two people "living together" who are not married. As a matter of fact, most people today don't really see anything wrong with pre-marital sex of any kind, as long as the couple plans on getting married. It is said that as long as it is just between him and her, as long as it doesn't hurt anyone else, there's nothing wrong with it.

But what does the Bible say about pre-marital sex? God calls it fornication, or sexual immorality. Fornication is illicit sex between two people who are not married. What society, and what some in the name of love call moral, God calls immoral. God calls it sin in I Thessalonians 4:3-8. There is never just two involved in fornication; there is always three. The will of God is involved, too. Because God's will is involved, He has the right to say that fornicators are wicked, and that they will NOT inherit the kingdom of God (I Corinthians 6:9). In the very next verse, God lists the fornicator along with the adulterer, the homosexual, the thief, the drunkard, and the swindler.

Many have gotten so far away from the Word of God, that they have let men tell them what is right, and what is wrong; what is wicked, and what is good; who will go to heaven, and who won't. The acceptance in our society of the sin of fornication is a good example of how deceiving, how wrong, and how misled we can become, when we listen to men, instead of God.

We cannot live by the standards or the traditions of men, and expect to be acceptable to God. God and His Word MUST NOT be left out of our lives. We will NOT be judged by the standards and traditions of men, BUT BY GOD AND HIS WORD (John 12:48.)

Have you checked who and what you are following lately? Is it God's Way, or man's way? There is a difference; one leads to death and destruction, while the other is right, and leads to life.

"Be firm in your convictions and you can well afford to be kind."

THE PEACEMAKERS

By Terry Frizzell

Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called children of God." (Matt. 5:9.)

The first question that comes to my mind when reading this verse of scripture is, "what is peace?" We have heard our politicians speak of peace during our lifetime, yet this has been spoken about within many lifetimes, and still we do not have peace in this world.

A closer look at Matt. 5:9 reveals to us that Christ is not talking about the peace of nations, although the thought must be considered that one who can make peace between others will be blessed. The peacemaker here is not the compromiser of disagreements and settlers of disputes among men. He is one that is reconciled to God and one who will show the people of the world how to find peace with God.

The peace, of which Jesus spoke, is that described by Paul in Rom. 10:15, where he said, "how beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace,

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The Peacemakers

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and bring glad tidings of good things." It is also the peace that Paul explains in Eph. 2:14-17, "for He is our peace . . . and came and preached peace to you who were afar off, and to them that were nigh." It is the peace that comes through justification by faith. "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." (Rom. 5:1.) The peacemaker is, therefore, the one who preaches or teaches the peace that is found only in Christ.

It would seem that most of us who have been obedient to the commands, in order to become Christians, have not truly been reconciled to God enough to find the peace that he gives. Perhaps we have not grown as we should because we read, "But the wisdom that is from above is first of all pure, then PEACEABLE, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without variance, without hypocrisy." (James 3:17.)

Only one who has found peace can lead another to find the same. A sincere, dedicated Christian is capable of working as a peacemaker because he can lead others to the peace which he has found in Christ.

As disciples of Christ we are to tell others how to be reconciled to God and by doing this we are peacemakers. Thereby we "shall be called Children of God," because by telling others of the peace in God we are performing the acts of the children of God.

This is not to say that all Christians are peacemakers for in Heb. 5:12 the writer says, "For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God . . ." In this rebuke to these people we can see they were not peacemakers because they were not teaching that which will bring peace.

"The great essentials of happiness are something to do, something to love, and something to hope for."

"Give your brother credit for being a good man unless you know that he is not."

"Measure your fellowman by his excellencies, not by his short comings."

Peacemakers are needed very badly in our world. We need to study God's word and make ourselves truly "the children of God" by teaching His will to men. "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God . . ." (1 John 3:1.)



Blinded Minds

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working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved."

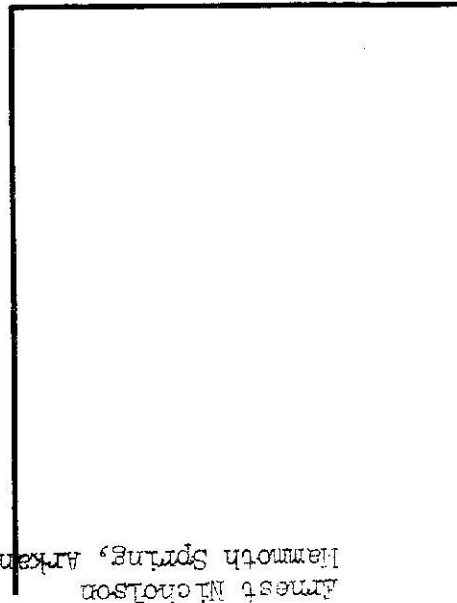
Satan doesn't care how religious one might be, or how sincere he might be, so long as that person does not obey the truth. One may believe in Christ, he may belong to some church, he may do good things, but if Satan is able to blind his mind to the truth, the person is lost. Jesus pictured religious people at the judgment who were lost. In Matt. 7:22-23 He said, "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me . . ." Since these had never been known by Christ, they had obviously never obeyed the gospel. While it is important and essential to be religious, we must be religious according to the will of God.

Another way that Satan has effectively blinded the minds of men to the truth is by prejudice. Prejudice is defined as, "A judgment or opinion held in disregard of facts that contradict it." We see this prejudice toward Christ by the Pharisees and others who lived during his earthly ministry. There was nothing that Jesus could have done to convince them that he was the Messiah. They had already made up their minds as to what the Messiah was to be like, and Jesus didn't fit the picture. There are still people whose minds are blinded by prejudice. It isn't uncommon to hear someone express, "You couldn't show me anything in the Bible that would make me change. I know what I've got. I can feel it in my heart, and I wouldn't trade this feeling for everything in the Bible." Jesus said that it takes the truth to make men free

(John 8:32). To close the mind to truth is to be blind indeed. Satan will put any kind of feeling in one's heart if it will cause that person to reject the truth.

Too, Satan may blind one's mind to the truth by confusing his priorities. To some religion is fine so long as it doesn't get in the way of other things. To these religion is just another part of life, and not the whole of life. Satan warns them not to take religion too seriously, not to go off the deep end on religion. Jesus demands that Christianity must have priority over all things in life, while Satan is reminding us that we have our family to think about, and our friends, jobs, recreation, etc. This is his device to blind us to our true responsibilities of life.

There are numerous ways that Satan works to blind the minds of men from the saving power of the gospel of Christ, and to the Christian life. Whether by deception, prejudice, or by misplacing our priorities, he does whatever is necessary to keep men lost. Jesus said, "And this is condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God." (John 3:19-21.) The light of that glorious gospel of Christ shines out to show us how to live and please God. It is God's power to save us and to keep us saved. May God help us never to let Satan blind our minds to the truth.



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