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You Can ... But You Can't

B.G. Hope

You can ignore God's warnings; you can refuse His blessing; you can reject all his wondrous love; but you can't go to heaven doing so.

You can believe any doctrine you choose; you can belong to the church of your choice; you can worship God as you please; but you can't please God doing so (2 John 9; John 8:32; Matthew 15:9,13; Hebrews 11:6; Romans 10:17).

It seems that Satan has done a remarkable job of convincing the people that their religion is a matter of their choice, not God's; that it is a matter of their being pleased, not God; that is, if they are pleased, then God must be.

People insist, "I have a right to believe as I please. I have a right to join the church of my choice. I have a right to worship God as I see fit." And I reply, "Yes, you most certainly do. Not only does the constitution of our great nation give us this privilege, but so does God himself. 'Choose this day whom ye will serve' is the way God would have it."

God created man a free moral agent — that is, He made him with the power to choose. You are admonished to choose between right and wrong, between false doctrine and the truth, between worshipping God as He directs and thus please Him and worshipping God as you are pleased to have it, between being a member of some denomination started by man and being a member of the church, between heaven and hell — yes, you have a right to go to hell, but do you prefer to exercise that right?

Yes YOU CAN do as you please — BUT YOU CAN'T please God at the same time.

We've Come a Long Way

John Gibson

About two years ago the Athens News Courier contained a quarter page ad inviting all to a "Free Community Cookout." The ad went on to say, "Join us as we say, 'Happy Birthday America' on Saturday, June 30th. We will begin serving hamburgers, hotdogs, chips and drinks at 6:00 pm and will serve until we run out. There will also be snow-cones, cotton candy, face painting and games. You will have the best view in town of the City of Athens' fireworks display."

Don't get me wrong about this. I'm a patriotic American who likes hamburgers, chips, and fireworks, so if this had been sponsored by the Lions Club or some other civic organization I wouldn't have thought twice about it. However, this Free Community Cookout was sponsored by a local church and that raises a lot of questions in my mind.

Is there anything in the New Testament that would suggest church sponsorship of such events is the will of God?
Matthew 7:21

Are there any examples of New Testament churches, under the guidance of the apostles (1 Cor. 4:17), hosting community events with free leg of lamb, pita bread, chariot races, and such?

Can a church rightfully claim to abide in the doctrine of Christ (2 John 9) and engage in practices never found in the New Testament?

When did the Lord tell us to change our approach from simply preaching the gospel as his power to save (Romans 1:16) to attempting to draw people with entertainment and food for their stomachs? See 1 Thessalonians 1:8 where it was said of the church in Thessalonica that "from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth."

Should our conduct be any different than that of Paul when he refused to give either the Jews or the Gentiles what they wanted, but insisted on giving them what they needed, viz. the message of the cross? (1 Cor. 1:21-23)

We've come a long way from the New Testament pattern when it was the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers who were equipping the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:12-13). Now, most churches feel they need a director of basketball operations, a grill master, a face painter, and a host of other things never even hinted at in the New Testament. Yes, many churches, including those calling themselves "of Christ," have come a long way, but the question remains—who gave the instructions to move?

"Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son." (2 John 9)

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven." (Matthew 7:21)

"And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.'" (Matthew 28:18)

"For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book." (Revelation 22:18-19)

The Lure Of The Easy Way

Dan S. Shipley

"And Jeroboam said in his heart, Now shall the kingdom return to the house of David: if this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, even unto Rehoboam king of Judah, and they shall kill me, and go again to Rehoboam king of Judah." (1 Kings 12:26,27)

Whether or not Jeroboam's fears were well founded is uncertain. However, of one thing we can be sure. He was more concerned about the people's loyalty to him than to God. To accomplish his aims, he shrewdly baits his trap with something that entices most all men — the lure of the easy way. He told them, "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem...". Little did it matter, apparently, that he gave them idols, pretended priests and pagan worship. The important thing was that he provided them with an easy religion — and that overshadowed all else. They became victims of the easy way.

Many are the mortals who have succumbed to the lure of the easy way, both spiritually and otherwise. Our advertising agencies have learned the devil's sales pitch well. They tell you how to lose weight — the easy way. They offer easy ways to quit smoking, to achieve physical fitness or financial independence. People haven't changed much since Jeroboam's day. They still fall for the same old bait, "the easy way"; and in doing so have filled the prisons, swelled the welfare rolls and lengthened unemployment lines (Not to mention the irretrievable waste of time, talent and potential). And, as in Jeroboam's day, the easy way is still a popular way in religion. The prospects of having to "go up to Jerusalem" (or even across town) is still too much for too many. They would take the denying self out of following Christ; the giving diligence out of seeking approval; and the striving out of entering in at the strait gate. Such would have the benefits without the bother. As Jesus says of others, "They have their reward."

As might be expected, even the Lord's church has been touched by the lure of the easy way. It is felt in our teaching program when preachers and teachers find it "too much" to make adequate preparation of their lessons and when Bible class students find it "too much" to study and prepare assigned work. It affects our visitation program when members

find it "too much" to leave their comfortable homes and TV programs to call on the sick or unfaithful. It affects our personal evangelism program when brethren think it "too much" to try and teach others the way of salvation. It affects the purity of the church when we think it "too much" to finally discipline the unruly among us. Of all things that contribute to the weakening of the church, none is more influential than taking the easy way.

The narrow way can never be the easy way. Not only are the ways different, they lead to different destinations (Matt. 7:14). "Going up to Jerusalem" may require self-denial, sacrifice and hard work but it's the way of the cross — and that leads home.