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COLLECT ON YOUR JUDGMENT

Spam is a wonderful thing. I'm not talking about the canned meat, but those numerous pieces of junk mail in my e-mailbox every day. Did you know that I can refinance my house, even though I don't own it? I can fix my septic tank, even though I don't know that I even have one. They tell me it is legal to own a cable descrambler; they just fail to mention that it is illegal to use it if you don't pay for the scrambled channels. Several people in Nigeria want to give this congregation thousands, or even millions, of dollars if we send them our bank account number. Beyond that, I can get a degree on line or buy all kinds of diet drugs.

I even saw the subject line for an e-mail that said they would tell me "how to collect on your judgement." I didn't open it to read it, but I am sure it was talking about getting money through some lawsuit. I was tempted to write them back and tell them how to collect on another judgment. For we all face a judgment; the question is will we collect on it, or owe.

"And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many." (Heb 9:27-28)

In spite of what some would like to believe, one of the most well established doctrines of the Bible is the judgment. Jesus frequently spoke about a final judgment, and how it would be better for some than others in that judgment. (Matt 11:20-24)

One entire chapter of the book of Matthew (chapter 25) is part of a discourse by Jesus about the judgment. In it he tells just what that e-mail purported to tell—how to collect on your judgment.

The simplest way to do so is simply to do nothing. When Jesus confronts those who would end up going into "everlasting punishment" (Matt 25:46), he says, "Inasmuch as ye did not [feed, clothe, visit, or give drink] to the least of these, ye did not to me." To collect eternal punishment at the judgment, all they had to do was *not do*.

On the other hand, to collect eternal life on your judgment requires some effort. Granted, most of the real effort was accomplished by Jesus. God's grace through the death of His son counts for more than anything.

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. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. (Eph 2:8-10)

Even Paul says here that we have to do something. We are not saved because of the works of men, but because of the work of Jesus. But we were created for some works, good works. In the judgment scene in Matthew 25 those who collect eternal life are those who did feed, clothe, visit, or give drink to those who needed it. Paul also said that good deeds were necessary to collect favorably on your judgment. He speaks of a "revelation of the righteous judgment of God; Who will render to every man according to his deeds: To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life." (Rom 2:6-7)

Other passages, of course, say that there is no remission of sins without faith, repentance, or immersion. Each of these is a work of God that is done by man for salvation. So, also are the good works of love and benevolence.

Everyone will collect on the judgment. Some will be happy with what they collect. Others will be disappointed. All will collect based on what they do, or don't do. It will be easy to collect unfavorably. But in truth it will be just as easy to collect favorably, because that is how God created us.

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ALL SORTS OF GUIDES

Park ranger. Tour. Road map. Baedekers, Fodors, or Michelin. (Unless you travel Europe you may not be very familiar with these three.) British Girl Scouts. What do these have in common? They are all guides. To this list we could also add the Pharisees, teachers, Jesus, and God.

Blind Guides

“Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.” (Matt 15:14)

Jesus said this specifically of certain Pharisees who were offended by something he had said. Later, in Matthew 23, a chapter full of woes on hypocritical Pharisees, he again calls them blind guides. “Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor!” (23:14) “Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel.” (23:24)

Those who thought that it was “my way or the highway,” whose knowledge that they had the truth blinded them to the real truth, were sightless. And yet they felt they were proper guides to others. Paul, himself a

adulterer, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege? Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God? (Rom 12:17-23)

Anyone who rejects the word of God because they think they have knowledge of what God wants becomes a blind guide trying to lead the blind. I can almost hear some people saying, “Yeah, and isn’t he talking about himself and all those people in the Church of Christ who think they are the only ones going to heaven?” Perhaps, the way many in the churches of Christ approached others in the past, such an accusation may be justified. Yet, truly, it is an unjust and self-serving question. Anyone who teaches his own doctrine, and can not base that doctrine entirely and exclusively on the Word of God is a blind guide. Anyone who can “speak where the Bible speaks, and be silent where the Bible is silent” is a sighted guide, no matter how much other, blinder guides accuse him of being blind. In the valley of the blind, the one eyed man may not be king; he may just be reviled as a lunatic.

Men Can be Guides

To avoid being a blind guide, then, one must walk as one with sight. He must, in the words of John, “walk in the light.” If every word of his doctrine is based on the light of God’s word, then he has the right to guide others.

It is indeed possible for a man to be a proper guide. The eunuch of the court of the Kandake of Ethiopia recognized this when he was talking to Philip. “And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me?” (Acts 8:30-31) The eunuch didn’t expect direct divine intervention on his behalf. He expected to be taught by a man who was more familiar with the scriptures than he.

The Jewish Christians were advised to pay attention to human guides, and honor them. “Remember them which guide you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.” (Heb 13:7) Those teachers who follow the word of God, and who live it, are worthy of emulation. They are not blind guides; they are instead the Girl Guides and Boy Scouts of the spiritual world.

Guided by Jesus and the Spirit

Jesus promised the apostles that they would have a guide. “Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he

If every word of doctrine
is based on God’s word,
it is a right guide.

Pharisee, applied this idea to all Jews who rejected Jesus as the Messiah, who thought of themselves as God’s only chosen people.

Behold, thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God, And knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law; And art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness, An instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law. Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? Thou that sayest a man should not commit

will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak.” (Jn 16:13) Some have mistakenly taken this passage to mean that the Spirit will directly teach each person what he needs to know to follow God. Instead, the Spirit was promised to guide the apostles. Indirectly, however, we are the recipients of that guidance. Because these men taught others what the Spirit gave them, and they or those others wrote the words in what we now know as the New Testament, we have the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Because the Spirit is the word of God, and that Word dwells in us, we follow the same guide as was promised to the apostles.

Even that Spirit, however, came after another guide—the Messiah. Before Jesus was born into the world the father of he who was to become the forerunner prophesied about him. “Whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.” (Lk 1:78-79) Jesus was to be our guide.

Actually, the phrase “was to be” in that last sentence may be wrong. John says that Jesus *is* to be a guide to the church.

They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall guide them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. (Rev 7:14-17)

There is a subtle twist to scripture in this passage. One of the most familiar passages in all of scripture is Psalm 23. It begins, “The Lord is my shepherd,” implying that the one singing the psalm is a lamb. In the second verse it says, “He leads me beside the still waters.” The shepherd leads the lamb to the water. Look again at Revelation 7:17. Who is the one who will guide to living fountains of water? It is not the shepherd; it is the Lamb. Sometimes we should follow one we least expect to be our guide. Jesus leads through service; he guides through humility.

Even before Jesus, though, God was guiding in the world. “Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.” (Ps 73:24)

How Does He Do That?

“I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye.” (Ps 32:8)

I’ve always found that an intriguing passage. How does God guide with his eye? Actually, I have come up with two examples that answer that question in my own mind.

The first is to compare us to a blind person. Left to our own devices we stumble and wander, getting ourselves into all sorts of danger without realizing it. We are in desperate need of a guide. So we get ourselves a guide dog, who is God. We can’t see the pitfalls and dangers, but God does. Like the guide dog for the blind man he guides us with his eye. He sees the dangers and gives us warnings. We may feel the guidance through gentle (or not so gentle) nudges. He may warn us with his word, or push us out of the way of danger. But it is His eye that sees the danger and leads us away.

The other possibility is that God leads us with His eye just as a parent may lead a child with her eye. (I say her because it is usually the mother that has this ability.) When a child reaches for the cookie jar while mom is cooking supper, does she have to say a word? No. She just looks at the child the right way, and he backs away. When a teenager comes home from a date after curfew, does mom have to say, “I am disappointed in you?” Probably not, because the erring daughter can see it in her eyes. Will she come home late again? Maybe not, because she has experienced “the look.”

God, not your mother, originated “the look.”

God was the one who originated “the look.” We may call it conscience, or breeding, or something else, but it is “the look.” It is God guiding us with His eye. Unless we have trained ourselves to ignore “the look” we know what is right and wrong. Which tree was forbidden to Adam and Eve—the tree of life or the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? It was the latter. They were exiled from the garden to prevent them from eating of the tree of life and live forever. (Gen 3:22-23) The forbidden fruit of which they had already eaten gave them the ability to distinguish good from evil, an ability we have inherited from them. We know right from wrong, and when we contemplate doing the wrong, God guides us with His eye. He looks at us with that “I am disappointed in you” gaze, and somehow we feel it. We feel it just as surely as we feel mom’s look even though our back is to her. God, like mom, guides us with His eye.

We have many guides. Some are good; others are not. We should carefully select those we will follow. We may be, in some ways, blind. But we don’t have to follow the blind. Not when we can follow God.

NEVER WRESTLE WITH A PIG

“Never wrestle with a pig. You both get dirty, ... and the pig likes it.”

I once had an Officer in Charge in the Navy who kept that saying on her desk. I have since found out that the first part of it is also the title of a book on business management.

The basic thought is that arguing with a person who doesn't know what they are talking about just brings you down to their level. I have certainly spent useless hours wrestling with religious pigs. One night I wasted two hours arguing with a man about whether the King James Version of the Bible was directly inspired by God. Since he would not accept the idea that the Bible preceded 1611 in both Hebrew and Greek, even though the preface to his Bible said so (but the preface was not inspired), it was useless to continue. It had been useless to begin, but I had yet to learn not to wrestle with pigs. This is not to say that everyone who believes the King James Version is the only inspired Bible, or any other doctrine with which I disagree, is a religious pig. Sometimes you get into a wrestling match thinking the other person is a thinking person, then find out he is a pig.

Paul warned against such wrestling with pigs. “Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith.” (1 Tim 1:4) “If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of

words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself.” (1 Tim 6:3-5) Such arguments serve no valuable purpose. Jesus, himself, put it a little differently. “Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.” (Matt 7:6)

There is another sense in which we sometimes wrestle with pigs. This way fits the original quote a little better, even than does the idea of arguing with people who don't know what they are talking about. Paul phrased it differently, but with the same intent. “Be not deceived. Evil companionships corrupt good morals.” (1 Cor 15:33)

When one wrestles with a pig in this sense, one gets dirty. You never wrestle with a pig and the pig gets cleaner. You may wrestle with a pig and neither gets dirtier, but the odds are against it. So the principle remains. If you choose to associate with those who would lead you to sin, chances are you will end up on their level...and they like it.

Someone called the second chapter of Proverbs Solomon's advice against joining a gang. It certainly would apply to modern gangs, but the application is broader. Solomon is simply giving the same advice as Paul did above. When you wrestle with pigs, chances are you will get as dirty as they.

Jesus died to make us clean. Don't return to the mire. Stay away from the pigs.

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