

Contending FOR THE Faith™

FOR THOSE WHO LOVE THE TRUTH AND HATE ERROR

SLAVERY, RIGHTS, LIBERTY, AND FREEDOM

Kenneth D. Cohn

SLAVERY

(With Historical Perspective provided by Thomas Sowell)

What about slavery? In considering this topic, we must define terms. Slavery, as considered here, is not any form of servitude, but chattel slavery. Under chattel slavery, a slave is considered as mere property, no more and no less valuable than a piece of equipment or item of inventory.

In a world free of slavery today, it may be hard to realize that slavery was an almost universal institution for thousands of years. In spite of widespread misconceptions in the United States today that the institution of slavery was based on race, for most of the millennia in which slavery existed around the world, it was based on whoever was vulnerable to enslavement and within striking distance.

Thus, Europeans enslaved other Europeans, just as Asians enslaved other Asians and Africans enslaved other Africans, while Polynesians enslaved other Polynesians and the indigenous peoples of the Western Hemisphere enslaved other indigenous peoples of the Western Hemisphere. The very word “slave” derived from the word for *Slav* not only in English, but also in other European languages, as well as in Arabic, because Slavs were so widely enslaved by fellow Europeans (and others) for centuries before Africans began to be brought in chains to the Western Hemisphere. In ancient Rome, the slaves included thousands of Greeks, as well as Britons, Syrians, and Jews. China in centuries past was one of the largest and most comprehensive markets for the exchange of human beings in the world. India has been

estimated to have had more slaves than that in the entire Western Hemisphere including children kidnapped by the original *Thugs* (a member of a religious organization of robbers and assassins in India. Devotees of the goddess Kali, the Thugs waylaid and strangled their victims, usually travelers, in a ritually prescribed manner. They were suppressed by the British in the 1830s). In some of the cities of Southeast Asia, slaves were most of the population. Such was also the case in the Roman empire.

As of the time when the United States was formed in 1776, Adam Smith wrote in *The Wealth of Nations* (published the same year) that Western Europe was the only part of the world where slavery had been “abolished altogether.” But even Western Europeans held many slaves in their overseas colonies.

Over the centuries, the consolidation of various regions of the world into nations with armies and navies reduced the number of places that could be raided for slaves without great costs and risks. Among the places where this consolidation process lagged, whether because of geographic or other fragmentation of peoples or for other reasons, were the Balkans, the backwaters of Asia and much of sub-Saharan Africa. Africans were not singled out by race for ownership by Europeans, they were resorted to increasingly as other sources of supply dried up. The slow pace of political consolidation in much of sub-Saharan Africa left many small and vulnerable societies there, whose people were raided and enslaved, largely by other Africans from more geographically favored settings—coastal peoples enslaving less advanced and less consolidated inland peoples, for example.

It was from the coastal peoples of West Africa that whites purchased slaves for shipment to the Western Hemisphere. In East Africa, both Africans and Arabs raided and

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Contending FOR THE Faith™

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Ira Y. Rice, Jr., Founder
August 3, 1917–October 10, 2001

Editorial...

FINIS

Of course, this is the last publication of *Contending for the Faith* for 2020. It is, therefore, proper to thank all of our readers for their support of whatever form it has taken. Your prayers on our behalf for the work we do are most appreciated and needed. And, we trust and pray that God will in His providential care cause things to work for your spiritual well-being in what time remains for all of us.

The year 2020 has ended. For obvious reasons, one in particular, most people are glad it is gone. They trust that the year 2021 will be a much better year than its predecessor. For however many years, history does not date it, with the demise of each old year, people express their sentiments that the coming new year will be better. But just how much “better” will 2021 be? What is there about the reality of any new year that provides us just cause to expect a better year than the recently deceased one? We will briefly consider the last two questions in this editorial.

“IT WAS THE BEST OF TIMES, IT WAS THE WORST OF TIMES”

People with only a cursory knowledge of the writings of Charles Dickens usually are familiar with the amazing beginning of his historical novel, *A Tale of Two Cities*, published in 1859—just over 160 years ago. It is set during the time of the French revolution, that part of it known as “the reign of terror.” It was a time when the guillotine was working overtime in France. We will not go into the story spun by Dickens, for in this editorial we are only interested in the thoughts expressed by him in his oft quoted opening remarks. Dickens wrote:

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way—in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.

Dickens could have written the same regarding any time in the history of mankind and been correct in his remarks. Thus, it is the case with 2020. If time continues, it will also be the case with the events of 2021 and beyond. In fact, in many instances “next year” has turned out to be worse or much worse than “last year” whenever that “next” and “last” may have been. But humankind has never learned the forging. Moreover, considering the facts of history there is no legitimate reason to think that the race of man will change for the better in this respect. Of course, there will be those

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enslaved the more vulnerable inland peoples. Meanwhile, the growing scope of international commerce and the growing wealth of nations eventually made economically feasible the transportation of vast numbers of slaves from one continent to another, thereby creating racial differences between the enslaved and their owners as a dominant pattern in the Western Hemisphere. Elsewhere, such a pattern was by no means limited to Europeans owning non-Europeans, however. There were many examples of the reverse—that is, Non-Europeans enslaving Europeans—quite aside from vast regions of the earth where neither the slaves nor their owners were either black or white.

Even after much of Europe was consolidated into nations with military and naval forces, unprotected coastal settlements in Europe, and European sailors at sea, remained vulnerable to slave raids by pirates from the Barbary Coast of North Africa (The Marine hymn includes the stanza “To the shores of Tripoli.” This harkens back to the time that the Marines invaded the Barbary Coast of North Africa as ordered by President Thomas Jefferson to stop the pirating of American seaman). These pirates enslaved at least a million Europeans between 1500 and 1800. That is more than the number of African slaves transported to the United States and to the American colonies from which it was formed. The Ottoman Empire also enslaved Europeans. Among other ways, it imposed a systematic levy of a certain percentage of young boys from the conquered peoples in Southeastern Europe, the boys being taken away as slaves, converted to Islam, trained and assigned civil and military duties in the empire. Other European slaves were acquired by purchase. Among these were Circassian women (noted for their beauty even today) from the Caucasus region, who were highly prized as concubines by wealthy men in the Ottoman Empire, and such positions were sufficiently prized by Circassians that mothers groomed their daughters for such roles.

The economic consequences of slavery, both during its existence and in its aftermath, have been a matter of controversy among scholars. (A major text favorable to the economics of slavery is: Robert William Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery*, 1974. For a different view, Google *The 1619 Project*). However, some of the more extravagant claims—that slavery was the basis for the prosperity of the United States, or of Western civilization in general—are clearly false. The American South, where slavery was concentrated, was for centuries the poorest and most backward region of the country, for its white population as well as for its black population. In Brazil, where slavery was concentrated in that country’s northern region, this too was, and remained, the poorest region. Brazil’s industrial development was concentrated in its southern region, and was largely the work of immigrants, most of whom arrived after the abolition of slav-

ery. Similarly, it was in the era after slavery was abolished that the United States rose to become the leading industrial power in the world—and here, too, this dramatic economic rise took place primarily outside the region where slavery had been concentrated.

Perhaps the most sweeping claim for the supposed economic effects of slavery is that the profits of slavery financed Britain’s industrial revolution. But even if all of Britain’s profits from slavery had been invested in its industry, that would have come to less than 2 percent of Britain’s domestic investments during that era.

Despite attempts to depict slavery as a localized evil, inflicted on one race by another, it was a vastly larger evil, inflicted on peoples around the world. As internationally recognized historian of slavery David Eltis put it: “

Slavery until recently was universal in two senses. Most settled societies incorporated the institution into their social structures, and few peoples in the world have not constituted a major source of slaves at one time or another.

To say that American society is illegitimate today because it had slavery when it was founded would be to say that virtually every nation around the world—whether black, white, or other races—was illegitimate at that same time, which hardly seems to be what critics are trying to suggest. At some period of their history, as John Stuart Mill put it, “almost every people, now civilized, have consisted, in majority, of slaves.”

While societies around the world had slavery, Western civilization was the first to turn against slavery, ending it within Western societies during the nineteenth century, with Brazil being the last Western nation to abolish slavery in 1888 (The United States was the only nation to end slavery by means of a bitterly fought civil war). Many non-Western societies then had slavery stamped out within them by Western nations that took over those societies during the era of European imperialism. But elsewhere vestiges of slavery persisted on into the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century, especially in parts of the Middle East and Africa. (Slavery stills exists today in many forms, including sexual slavery and exploitation, estimated to be as much as 40 million. See www.antislavery.com. This organization was founded by William Wilberforce who was instrumental in passage of the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833 by the British parliament ending slavery in Britain).

DOES THE BIBLE CONDEMN SLAVERY?

Slavery today is considered a great moral evil by most regardless of religious persuasion or opposition. The New Testament is for the most part the Christian’s guide in all things moral but one must not forget that the old law was our schoolmaster (or tutor) to bring us to Christ (Gal. 3:24) and for our learning (Rom. 15:4). We, therefore, must consider what the Bible has to say about slavery, either explicitly or

implicitly, if it has anything to say at all. Does God categorically condemn slavery or is He indifferent to the practice? In considering this question, whatever God's attitude may be, it must be admitted by all that God is no respecter of persons, therefore, His thinking on the matter applies to black slaves as well as the more numerous non-black slaves.

First, consider what the Bible has to say about slavery in the law of Moses which was given to the Jews (Deu. 5:1-5). The institution of slavery is not formally condemned in the OT or the NT for that matter. Some things to keep in mind:

1. The forms of slavery (or servitude in general) practiced in a biblical context bear little resemblance to slavery practiced in the world up to the present. Certain forms of "servitude" (indentured servitude) were considered morally beneficial before God under certain circumstance, for example, voluntary indenturement to earn a living or to learn a trade. A criminal could also be indentured to render restitution. In none of these cases or in cases of foreigners captured by the Israelites in war would the slave or servant be viewed as chattel, i.e., a mere piece of property, without human rights. Servitude under the old law was not lifelong bondage but had its limits (Deu. 15:12-13).

2. The institution of slavery in the Old Testament, the New Testament, and on down to the 1800s in the Western World and to present times elsewhere, was pervasive and deeply rooted in ancient cultures, including the Egyptians, Sumerians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Phoenicians, Syrians, Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Greeks, Romans, ad infinitum. In fact, during the first century A. D., approximately 85 to 90 percent of Rome's population consisted of slaves. To even suggest that slavery was not essential to the economy of the time was considered ludicrous. The law of Moses, however, limited and regulated the practice and sought to correct its inhumane abuses (Exo. 20:10, 21:20-27). Unlike other cultures, Israelite masters did not have absolute rights over their slaves. The various forms of slavery were permitted in the OT but were never considered the ideal morally (Deu. 15:18).

3. Unlike most ancient cultures, and even modern ones, slaves in the OT were recognized as full persons who possessed human dignity and basic rights (Deu. 5:14; Job 31:13-15). The abuse of slaves and servants was viewed as imprudent and immoral (Deu. 23:15-16). The institution of slavery was never condemned, but neither did it have the connotations acquired by those societies who traded humans as chattel.

4. Now, in the NT, Paul stated that those who have put on Christ are neither slave nor free (Gal. 3:28; Col 3:11). Although the context is spiritual, it remains that the slave and master are equal before God. Paul does not encourage the slave to rebel, but rather be the best slave possible. Likewise, he admonishes the master to treat the slave with the same care and consideration that he expects of the slave (Eph. 6:5-

9, See also Mat. 7:12).

5. The gospel was preached throughout the world. Many Gentiles, masters and slaves alike, rendered obedience to its call. When Christians in a certain area assembled for the Lord's Day worship, master and slave gathered in the same assembly. Therefore, a situation like that described in the 2nd chapter of James presented itself. When James explicitly forbids respect of persons, by what right could the master force the slave to occupy a position of lesser standing? They are all one in Christ, neither slave nor free. Only by ignoring these principles could the institution survive as then practiced in the Gentile world of the 1st century and on into the 19th century.

It may be rightly said that the institution of slavery was ended by the Gospel, rightly divided. *There had to be a change of people's hearts before there could be a change of institutions.*

THE CHRISTIAN AS A VOLUNTARY SLAVE

One common characteristic of slavery in ancient times and today is that the slave must do the bidding of the master. In Romans 6:15-22, we read:

What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness.

For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. *NKJV*

What does it mean to be "slaves of sin" and "slaves of righteousness"? It is clear from the preceding passage that one can be a slave to righteousness or unrighteousness, but not at the same time. The reason is that the masters are different. The individual is a slave in either case, but a contrast is being made. Chattel slavery almost always results from and is maintained by coercion in some form. Obedience is demanded by the master and rendered by the slave as an essential element of the chattel bond. The will of the master is the only will that matters.

In the spiritual sense, obedience is also demanded by the master and rendered by the slave. Man will of necessity have one (and only one) of the two competing masters of men, Satan or God. There is no circumstance where man has no

master. Neither will tolerate obedience to the other. To be the slave of one is to be free of the other. Thus, Jesus could say, **“If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free”** (John 8:31b-32). Again, one must ask, “Free from what?” The Jews certainly asked. Jesus answered by saying, **“I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin”** (John 8:34b). One cannot be a slave of sin if he does not commit sin. If one does not know the truth and love that truth, he cannot be free from sin. One abiding in His word will know the truth. To abide in His Word is an uncoerced choice, i.e., a voluntary servitude. To be free then is to be free of their sinful condition prior to knowing His Word, i.e., His Gospel, which is God’s power to save (Rom. 1:16-17).

It is because of this freedom from servitude to sin that Paul could say, **“Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage”** (Gal 5:1-2) and James could write, **“But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does”** (James 1:25). A contrast is being made with the Old Law, the Mosaical Law. One could be saved under the Old Law if, and only if, that one kept the Old Law perfectly. But Paul said all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23), with the one exception being Jesus Christ which qualified Him to be the spotless Pascal Lamb. The Old Law could only condemn the one who had transgressed the Law, therefore, it was a **“yoke of bondage.”** The liberty in Christ made us free from that yoke.

So, there is a form of slavery that God and the Bible do support, that being complete subservience to our Heavenly Father and the Christ. The inescapable fact is that spiritually we are all slaves to either God or to Satan. There is no middle position. Like Joshua of old said,

And if it seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord (Josh 24:15).

RIGHTS, LIBERTY, AND FREEDOM UNDER CIVIL GOVERNMENT

There is a temporal master authorized by the Gospel of Christ, that being civil government (Rom. 13ff). It is a master that should be beneficent, but so often it has been used to oppress the citizenry whom it is supposed to serve while favoring those in power. It is difficult for any human to be invested with so much power and in control of so much wealth without succumbing to the corrupting influences of both. As John Dahlberg-Acton, also known as Lord Acton, said in 1887, “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” Great men are almost always bad men,

even when they exercise influence and not authority, still more when you superadd the tendency or the certainty of corruption by authority. There is no worse heresy than that the office sanctifies the holder of it.

Therefore, it is a form of slavery that we ought to consider and treat in the remainder of this essay. The second paragraph to the Declaration of Independence reads in part,

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.

The preamble to The Constitution of the United States of America reads in part,

We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution of the United States of America.

I would like to focus on the concept of Liberty. Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness are specifically enumerated Rights, but not all of them. Liberty was conceived by the founding fathers as a Right. Furthermore, the Constitution declares that Liberty has certain blessings that must be secured. *By implication, there is a right to secure these blessings, but it does not necessarily follow that the individual has the ability or skills to secure these blessings.*

Liberty means the condition in which an individual has the ability to act following his or her own will, but not only the ability but also the legal right to do so. A legal right would mean that there is legal immunity when rights are pursued. There is much talk today about rights, human rights, women’s rights, rights of this or that group. There is very little discussion of human rights without bias. It almost invariably pits one group’s interest against another or society at large.

There is much talk today about “human rights” as seen from the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution, and indeed throughout history. It appears recently to be much confusion about what Liberty or Rights means. But that was not so throughout much of our history as a nation. State constitutions of the 18th Century give ample evidence of the overwhelmingly Christian view that rights are endowed by the Creator of the Universe, with a manifest connection between Christianity, moral virtue, and national liberty. There is much talk today about human rights, women’s rights, gay rights, animal rights, and so on, but little talk about duties and responsibilities. *Quite frankly, I find that rights are confusing without specifying the duties associated with those rights.*

A right, as stated, is a legal immunity, primarily from the State imposing its will on the individual or populace. God had a legal right to the Tree of the Knowledge of Good

and Evil. Man did not. Consequently, God could specify the terms for access to it or deny access altogether. No one could usurp his rightful claim to this tree. No one has a rightful claim to another's property; there Adam and Eve had no legal right to partake of its fruit. A duty or responsibility to do something implies an immunity from coercive interference. When Jesus said to **“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature”** (Mark 16:15), the Christian is immune from the jurisdiction of the State if the State makes laws prohibiting the Christian from fulfilling his duties (Acts 5:29).

There is a moral and intellectual relativism today that causes confusion over human rights and judicial pronouncements. If it is assumed that no real absolute law exists, then it follows that an individual's rights must be relative. The reason that there is so much debate about what is right, i.e., what is ethical or moral, is that there is no consensus about what is right. Many maintain that to define what is “right” is to speak in absolute terms, which does not fit the evolving nature of morality based on an evolutionary worldview. To speak of absolute rights is to speak of an absolute source of such rights. As long as moral relativism prevails, human rights will always be elusive. There is no common ground to discuss “liberty” as a right without a biblical definition of liberty. No one in a communist state can say that a “human right” is being violated when the system is unhinged from any moral absolutes. Without an unchangeable law, there can be nothing to criticize.

When a nation moves away from the absolutes of God's law, a human contrived substitute will fill the void. The “human rights” idea has become the alternative to biblical principles. All too often today it forms the basis for all areas of human conduct. Man becomes the denominator and determiner of what comprises “human rights.”

The modern doctrine of human rights answers to no one but man. Lawmaking power is therefore assigned to man as man. Man cannot be held responsible to anyone greater than himself. Responsibility is denied because there is no one to whom responsibility must be shown. Where there is no responsibility, there is no accountability. The prevailing “law” is that every man does what is right in his own eyes (Jud. 17:6). Instead of working for justice (as defined by God's law), the disgruntled demand individual or class rights based on their own distorted views of justice. The most powerful, those who speak the loudest and carry the most political clout, are the ones who gain the greatest number of “rights”, usually for themselves and at the expense of others. Human rights become a declaration of self-law. *Responsibility and accountability are abandoned for self-declaration.*

If each one is doing what is right in his own eyes, then there are as many laws as there are individuals, or at least as many as have the power. Since every individual is a law unto himself, each (or the group they represent) will demand

rights for himself or themselves. Responsibility to the one true God is denied, and a struggle among the many contradictory claimants of “rights” ensues.

Man, however, must answer to someone. To make the human rights doctrine work, the State must enforce the prevailing system of human rights as conceived by the majority, or a revolution will usher in a new system of rights. Without the particulars of God's law, the “rights” of some can be taken away to secure the “rights” of others.

A careful study of Scripture does not support the idea of “human rights” as conceived and promulgated by humanists today. God's warning to Adam was that if he disobeyed the clear command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he would die (Gen 2:16-17). Paul said that life, breath, and all things are gifts from God (Acts 17:25). We cannot, therefore, claim them as rights. If life is a gift from God, then to take away life at its very inception is an act of rebellion against God (Rom. 1:28-32). The modern doctrine of human rights, because it is not rooted in God's character and law, can designate some lives unworthy of existence. Laws can then be passed to dispose of the lives of those undesirable or unwanted. Because God is the giver of life, it is not the duty of those in power to grant rights to anyone but to protect the lives that God has called into existence. Rights will not do this, unless coupled with responsibility and accountability to an absolute divine standard.

Christians are not to work for “human rights” (whatever that is) but are to be responsible to an all holy God and to follow His Law. No one can understand the nature of “rights” until one is confronted with his own sin, the provision that God has made to make man free from sin, and the responsibility that everyone has to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12). Justice must be defined in terms of the blood that Jesus shed on the cross. After all, Jesus went to the cross because justice demanded that the sinner be condemned. It just so happened that Jesus was not the sinner, but we were. If one wants to be right, he must be made right in the manner prescribed in the Gospel.

The course of this nation, or any nation, depends on the people submitting to the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior and Redeemer. There will be no blessings, i.e., rights, for the people of this nation, or any other nation, if the sole concern is for “human rights” rather than the saving message of the Gospel, God's power to save (Rom. 1:16-17). We hear today about the “right to choose”, the “right to life”, the “right to healthcare”, the “right to a living wage”, the “right to die” and so on. All will be held responsible before God to obey the demands of the Gospel. Justice will then prevail in all these areas by His Grace when these demands are met.

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exceptional individuals who learn from the inspired wise man that, **“The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun”** (Ecc. 1:9). Nevertheless, in vain, people continue to expect what the Bible as well as experience gives us no reason to expect—paradise on earth.

As did the writer of Ecclesiastes, we do not converse in ancient Hebrew. We are not of their culture or religion. Our society and technology are quite different from theirs. The nations and governments of that bygone day do not exist and governments, in most cases, have radically changed from then until now. We are so different from them, but our humanity remains the same.

With the foregoing in mind, please at least consider the message of the book of Ecclesiastes, for it addresses man’s fleshly and time bound vanities, concerns, fears, wishes, hopes, and aspirations. Humans remain the same in the flesh as they have ever been and always will be in time and space. Neither will they change. In general, humans have always used this life as an end within itself. We trust in timely, fleshly, and material things, knowing all the time we must at one time or another die, leaving all behind. When that day comes, as it must for all if our Lord does not return first, to whom will they then belong (Luke 12:16-21; Heb. 9:27; 2 The. 1:7-9)? If anything is certain, time and this present system of physical things will cease to be (2 Pet. 3:10-12) and there will be no more wishing anyone a happy new year.

What great progress for the race of man could be made if all would learn, take to heart, and practise what the Holy Spirit-inspired wise man concluded in the long ago:

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil (Ecc. 12:13, 14; See Mat. 6:33).

Further, how different lives would be if we humans truly believed the inspired James about our lives on earth when he penned, **“Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away”** (Jam. 4:14). Should I insert a “Happy New Year!” at this point in this missive? In 2021, how many truly think that humanity as a whole will change its conduct to embrace what is taught in the previously noted book, chapter, and verses of the Bible? One must fly into the face of the facts of God’s Word, mankind’s history, and all one witnesses today to conclude that the race of man will not continue rushing through the wide gate and stampeding in droves down the broad way, leading them to eternal damnation in a devil’s hell (Mat. 7:13, 14; Luke 13:24). This is the case because **“There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof**

are the ways of death” (Pro. 14:12; 16:25). Why should we think 2021 will be any different for mankind in general? Maybe a “Happy New Year!” belongs here.

THE GOSPEL AND THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

To understand the Gospel and church of Christ as those terms are defined and used in the Bible means that one fully recognizes the Bible to be the inerrant, all-sufficient, complete, final, and authoritative will of the one true and living God (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). Further, it must be studied as seriously as one can possibly study anything with the full intent to learn the will of God and do it (2 Tim 2:15; Luke 6:46; 8:15; Heb. 5:9). Does anyone truly think humans are going to do that in 2021?

Regardless of what anyone does or does not do, it is the responsibility of each Christian, few in number though they be, to give their lives to the study, practice, and defense of the Word of God (Jude 3; Phi. 1:17; Rom. 1:16; John 8:31, 32; Acts 2). As Jesus said, **“If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me”** (Luke 9:23). In other words, God has given us this time on earth to get ready for eternity. He has prepared a place (earth) that is perfect for getting ready for heaven. Being free moral agents we are expected to use our time on earth preparing for eternity. This means that we deny ourselves and submit to God’s mandates found only in the New Testament system of salvation through Jesus Christ (Jos. 24:15; Rev. 22:17). If people would do the foregoing, it would be a happy new day. We are not on earth to do as we please but to do as God pleases. However, the foregoing is the fundamental reason most will not enter heaven—they want what they want, when they want it, the way they want it, and for the reason or reasons they want it. Furthermore, if they believe in God at all, they expect Him to accept whatever that desire to offer him.

Sadly, they have never learned that such an attitude toward God and the conduct it produces (disobedience to God) did not work for Cain and it never has worked for man at any time in history (Gen. 4:4, 5; Heb. 11:4; Rom. 10:17). Does anyone expect the race of man to adopt Able’s disposition of mind toward God? Surely, Cain’s attitude toward God and His Word remains the dominant attitude of mankind toward God, and sadly it is true among many who believe in God. Remember, Cain was not an atheist. Does 2021 offer any hope that mankind will embrace Able’s attitude and conduct toward God? No, “Happy new year!” fits here.

HAPPY TODAY!— LIVING THE LORD’S WAY.

“Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof” (Mat. 6:34). How often have we taught that all we can do is live today as God teaches us to live. Think of the anxiety, worry, and the frustration that we heap on our own heads by not following the

prescription of the Great Physician for living life (Col. 3:17; John 12:48). If I do today as the Lord bids me to do then if tomorrow becomes today or not, I am ready for whatever comes. As James also wrote, **“For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that”** (Jam. 4:15).

Notice in the previous verse that James was writing to Christians. This is the case with most of the books of the New Testament. If we could only get elders, preachers, Bible class teachers, and members in general to realize that fact then and only then would we would have the spiritual lives and fellowship that God desires for his church. But, many in the church enjoy having things their way no matter what it does to the unity of the church. It was the case in the early church and brethren remain about the same today (2 Cor. 12:12; Gal. 5:20). James also wrote, **“But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors”** (Jam. 2:9). This admonition by James does not seem to bother them.

Some who over the years have said much about unscriptural fellowship (and rightly so), have learned to turn a “blind eye” to family members and their close friends when it comes to consistently and steadfastly practising corrective church discipline as Christians are taught to do in First Corinthians 5:3-11, 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 7, 2 John 9-11, and like passages. But the apostle Paul teaches us today as he did almost two thousand years ago. The apostle wrote:

Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of

themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9, 10; Also see Gal. 5:19-21).

We will not put a “Happy New Year!” here, either.

What is needed for any day to be a happy day in the lives of church members is for them to live holy lives. As Paul also wrote to the Galatian churches:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And they that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit (Gal 5:22-25).

James put it in the following words, **“Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world”** (Jam. 1:27). And, Peter taught, **“Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently”** (1 Pet. 1:22)

In the new heavens and new earth wherein dwells righteousness we will truly know a “Happy Eternal New Age.” But to reach those eternal glorified shores we must live one day at a time with the New Testament always directing our way. May God’s richest blessings rest upon the faithful of God.

—David P. Brown, Editor