

EVERYBODY IS NOT DOING IT

“And behold, there came a voice unto him and said, what doest thou here, Elijah? And he said, I have been jealous for the Lord God of hosts, because the children of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, thrown down Thine altars, and slain Thy prophets with the sword, and I, even I only am left, and they seek my life, to take it away. And the Lord said unto him, ... Yet I have left Me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him.” [1 Kgs 19: 13b, 14, 15a, 18]

“If you can’t beat them, join them” is a popular saying these days. Churches are solemnizing same-sex marriages, condoning divorce and preaching prosperity without reference to salvation. Public authorities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are distributing condoms to teenage boys and girls under the guise of fighting the spread of HIV/AIDS but they don’t seem to worry about the moral implications of their action. Christian doctors are running abortion clinics and Christian lawyers are defending their constitutional right to do so, as long as it is legitimate business. Corruption and immorality in high places are best sellers for tabloids and television. We are passing through “perilous times” and human beings have become “lovers of their own selves ... without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God.” [2 Tim. 3:2-4]

It is true that every rule has an exception. But, when the exception becomes the rule, there is an ever-present danger to a society’s sanity and normalcy. This problem has confronted man over the ages. Jeremiah was so depressed that he asked God, “wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? Wherefore are all they happy that deal treacherously?” [Jer. 12:1]. The Psalmist lamented, “these are the ungodly who prosper in the world; they increase in riches. Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency” [Ps. 73:13-14]. But is everybody really doing it? Has evil finally driven off good?

No, says God to Elijah. In responding to his lament that he was the only faithful worshipper of the living God left in all of Israel, God assured Elijah that there were 7,000 others left [1 Kgs 19:18], that hope was not lost. Hell has been enlarged [Is. 5:14] and nothing defiled, “neither whatsoever worketh abomination or maketh a lie, but they which are written in the Lamb’s book of life” shall enter into God’s kingdom [Rev. 21:27].

In today’s lesson, we shall study some biblical cases to show that everybody is not doing it; that those who join blindly are actually heading for destruction wide-eyed.

1. Who are you following?

Whether you admit it or not, you are imitating somebody or something in your daily choices. Who influences your behaviour the most: parents, spouse, teacher, self, peers, church, Jesus Christ?

In the ever-popular book, *The Lonely Crowd* [Yale University Press, 1969], retired Harvard University professor, David Riesman, has identified three types of people: *the tradition-directed, the other-directed and the inner-directed*. Let us use that framework to know whom or what we are following.

(a) The tradition-directed

Tradition consists of the values, norms and precepts passed down to us from past generations. The language we speak and the culture that goes with it both convey an essential part of our tradition. The main aim of tradition is to promote stability, conformity and group cohesion. A nation's Constitution, whether written or unwritten (as in the U.K.), is in most cases a distillation of a people's traditional values and practices.

During His earthly ministry, Jesus had a running battle with the Jewish leaders over tradition. He rebuked them for rejecting the commandment of God "that ye may keep *your own tradition*" [Mk 7:9], thus "making the word of God of none effect *through your tradition*, which ye have delivered and many such like things do ye" [Mk 7:13]. The parents of the man born blind that Jesus had healed feared to confess Jesus "because they feared the Jews; for the Jews had agreed already that if any man did confess that He was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue" [Jn 9:22]. Social isolation is a major weapon used by Moslem and Hindu communities to prevent their people from openly accepting Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. The world system, controlled by Satan, is an integral part of the tradition of the so-called civilized world. That is why believers are warned to "beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after *the tradition of men*, after the rudiments of the world and not after Christ" [Col. 2:8].

Happily, believers also have a tradition, based on God's revelations for "God who at sundry times and in diverse manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son" [Heb. 1:1-2]. That tradition has been documented in the *Holy Bible*. Therefore, on every human issue or problem, we have a choice between God's tradition and that of the world.

Let me sound a loud note of warning here. *Denominational tradition is not God's tradition unless it is anchored on His word*. The Jewish leaders who opposed Jesus claimed to be upholding the Law of Moses. However, "they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God" [Rom. 10:3].

(b) Other-directed

The grass is always greener elsewhere. We are forever trying to keep up with the Joneses (mentors, heroes, peers, rivals, competitors, etc.). We like to belong, to be accepted. Unfortunately, you cannot hit a moving target.

Abraham listened to his wife and married her maid, Hagar [**Gen. 16:1-3**]. The current poisoned relations between Israel (Isaac's descendants) and the Arabs (Ishmael's descendants) are a product of that misadventure. In the wilderness, the children of Israel believed the evil report, the majority report, submitted by 10 of the 12 spies sent to spy out the Promised Land, and questioned Moses' leadership. For that, they spent 40 years in the wilderness and the disobedient generation never arrived [**Num. 14:29-34**].

If you must follow others, follow Jesus, "the author and finisher of our faith" [**Heb. 12:2**], or those who will lead you to Him. As Paul has put it, "be ye followers of me, *even as I also am of Christ*" [**1 Cor. 11:1**] and "those things which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do; and the God of peace shall be with you" [**Phil. 4:9**].

If you must join those that you can't beat, follow those going to the church for, as the Psalmist has said, "*I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holyday*" [**Ps. 42:4**].

(c) Inner-directed

There is a core of human beings that neither follow tradition nor imitate others. They lean on themselves, on what is inside them. The revolutionaries, leading world inventors and religious leaders can be found in this group. The trouble comes when we look within us for the wrong thing because what defiles a man comes from within [**Matt.15: 18-19**]. Selfishness is powered by self-centredness. Korah and Dathan rebelled against Moses and drew away many followers. In the end, they were all buried alive when God opened the earth, which swallowed them up [**Num. 16:1-3, 31-35**].

People study astral sciences and practise Yoga and other transcendental arts in search of an inner strength or meaning which is not there outside of God [**Acts 19:19**]. "Greater is He that is you than he that is in the world" [**1 Jn 4:4**]. When Jesus lives within us [**2 Cor. 13:5**], then we become the temples of the living God and as He has promised, "I will dwell in them and walk in them and I will be their God and they shall be My people" [**2 Cor. 6:16**]. It is for this reason that Paul has advised us, "be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" [**Rom. 12:2**]. *If you have the mind of Christ* [**1 Cor. 2:16**], *the only place to look for spiritual guidance is within you*. That is why Jesus has

said that when you pray, you should “enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to your Father which is in secret” [Matt. 6:6].

From the foregoing, we see that a true believer should not have any problem with following the truth to the very end. If you trust in God and your mind is stayed on Him, He will keep you in perfect peace [Is. 26:3], and you will no longer fear what man can do on to you [Ps. 118:6] “for this God is our God for ever and ever; He will be our guide even unto death” [Ps. 48:14].

2. Those who refused to do it

(a) The lust of the eyes and of the flesh [Gen. 39:1-23]

Joseph was 17 years old when his problems with his family began [Gen. 37:2]. In a series of dreams, God had revealed the future of the family and Joseph’s preeminent role in its fulfilment. Out of envy, they sold him into slavery in Egypt where, by divine providence, he became the servant of Potiphar, a top general in Pharaoh’s army [Gen. 39:1]. Potiphar “saw that the Lord was with him, and that the Lord made all that he did to prosper in his hand” [v. 3]. He made Joseph “overseer in his house and over all that he had” [v.5].

This is when the devil entered into Potiphar’s wife’s head for she “cast her eyes upon Joseph, and she said, lie with me” [v. 7]. According to the ways of the world, Joseph should do it because they were consenting adults! Moreover, “the goodman [husband] is not at home, he is gone a long journey ... and will come home at the day appointed” [Prov. 7:19]. They were alone and nobody would ever know about it. But Joseph refused *bluntly*, saying, “*how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?*” [Gen. 39:9].

The temptation kept coming “day by day” [v.10], so was his refusal. Even when she tried to rape him, he ran out of the house, leaving his outer garment in her hands [vv. 11-12]. That was the evidence she used to frame a lie of attempted rape against innocent Joseph. On the strength of her evidence, Joseph was put in Pharaoh’s prison where he met and ministered to Pharaoh’s butler. At the appropriate time two years later, the butler mentioned Joseph to Pharaoh at the exact time he needed a person like him. Having fulfilled his own end, God in turn fulfilled His promise to Joseph when Pharaoh named him the Governor of Egypt, next in rank only to the Pharaoh himself [Gen. 41:1-14, 37-43]. Everybody is not doing it!

(b) Fear of man [Dan. 3: 1-30]

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were three young Jewish exiles in Babylon and Daniel’s prayer partners [Dan. 2:17-18]. When Daniel was made “chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon,” he requested of the king to also appoint his partners “over the affairs of the province of Babylon” [vv. 48-49].

Soon after, Nebuchadnezzar made a golden image, which he commanded all his subjects to worship [Dan. 3: 1-7]. As top officers, the princes, judges, treasurers, counselors, sheriffs and the rulers of the provinces were expected to lead the way [v.3]. Ordinarily, it would be out of place for these three provincial rulers who happened to be Jews to be out of step with their colleagues. Why shouldn't they render "unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's?" so we would caution. Not those young zealous Jewish exiles!

Their colleagues, who saw it as an opportunity to get them out of such prime appointments, reported their disobedience to the king. He called them to defend themselves but they maintained their faith in the one true God. The king threatened to burn them alive, but that did not frighten them a bit:

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up [vv. 16-18].

Certainly, the king was not going to allow such rascals to disgrace him in the presence of his subjects who considered him a god. He had to make an example of these boys to discourage others. Heat the fire seven times more! Get me my strongest soldiers! Com'on, hurry up! The fire was so hot that even those who threw them in died [vv. 19-22]

Instead of being roasted alive, "the Son of God" descended into the fire and rescued the boys alive, unhurt, untouched, unbound! [vv. 23-25] Did not God promise true believers that they will pass through fire and that they will not be burnt? [Is. 43:1-2] In defeat, the king decreed "that every people, nation, and language which speak anything amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, shall be cut in pieces... because *there is no other God that can deliver after this sort.*" In addition, they were promoted [vv. 26-30]. So, because three young people refused to join the rest in idolatry, the then most powerful empire in the entire world was won for God. Everybody is not doing it!

(c) A house of prayer or a den of thieves? [Acts 8:5-25]

The greatest danger to the church today is the prostitution of spiritual gifts for material gains. We are accepting fat tithe cheques from worshippers, even when we know that the sources of their incomes are questionable. We are ordaining as ministers persons who do not show by their fruits that they are called or even fear God. The church is being turned into small and medium enterprises run by dubious entrepreneurs. But everybody is not doing it!

In the early church, Philip was one of the seven deacons (along with Stephen) appointed by the Apostles as administrators [Acts 6:1-5]. He was the one that the Holy Spirit sent to preach to the Ethiopian eunuch [Acts 8: 26-40]. Through his ministry in Samaria, “unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them, and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed” [Acts 8:7]. One of those converted was Simon who had used witchcraft to win a large following among the people who saw him as “the great power of God” vv. 9-10]. He became baptized and followed Philip, wondering and “beholding the miracles and signs which were done” [v. 13].

When the Apostles in Jerusalem heard what had been achieved by Philip in Samaria, they sent Peter and John to go there and pray for the new converts, that they might receive the Holy Spirit [vv. 14-15]. Simon, the ex-magician, was amazed to see people receive the Holy Spirit just by Peter and John laying hands on them. So, he offered them money, “saying, give me also this power, that on whomever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost” [vv. 18-19]. Surely, he couldn’t have offered pennies for such a mighty request. Remember that he was a rich trickster and he knew how much he had cheated out of others. It might have been a mouth-watering offer, the kind that our new generation of ministers could hardly resist! But, not the Apostles!

Peter cursed him, saying, “thy money perish with thee, because thou thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money” [vv. 20-21]. Indeed, everybody is not doing it and money does not answer all things as I hear Eccl. 10:19 being cited out of context to justify prosperity ministries. Freely we have received and freely we are to give [Matt. 10:8], and only for God’s glory.

3. Conclusion

One thing is clear: *we are not all into worship for heaven’s sake!* Some are there for business or social status and the fear of God is not part of their vision. “Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore, the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil” [Eccl. 8:11]. Nevertheless, we know their expected end: they are in slippery places and God will cast them into destruction [Ps. 73:18]. But, for those who can remain faithful to the end, the reward is enormous: material prosperity with peace of mind here on earth, and eternal life in heaven hereafter [Matt. 19:27-29].

Don’t allow any one to deceive you. Let them call you names: “out of touch with reality”, “old fashioned”, etc. So they laughed at Noah when he was carving the ark during the dry season. When the floods came, Noah and his family laughed last [Gen. 7:21-22]. Remain on course. Everybody is not doing it. A cable television network recently featured a growing group of young Americans who are determined to remain virgins until marriage. Newspapers do report daily around the world stories of honest taxi-drivers and police officers who return huge sums of money and other valuables lost by travellers. Everybody is not doing it!