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## **CHURCHIANITY AT WAR WITH CHRISTIANITY!**

**Today's text:** Joshua 22: 11-34; 1 Cor. 1: 10-17

**Extracts:**

1. **“And the children of Israel heard say, behold, the children of Reuben and ...of Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh have built an altar over against the land of Canaan, in the borders of Jordan... and the children of Israel gathered themselves together at Shiloh, to go to war against them [saying], what trespass is this that ye have committed against the God of Israel, to turn away this day from following the Lord, in that ye have builded you an altar, that ye might rebel this day against the Lord?” [Josh. 22: 11, 12, 16]**
2. **“For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, ...that there are contentions among you, ... that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?” [1 Cor. 1: 11-13]**

*In the book, **I dared to call Him Father** [Michigan: Chosen Books, 1978; pp. 70-80], a Pakistani Moslem convert to Christianity, Bilquis Sheikh, tells the story of her baptism. Through dreams and visions, God had led her to accept Jesus Christ even before she met the first Christian couple, with whom she began to fellowship. Then, one day, Jesus appeared to her and told her that it was time for her water baptism, “Get your baptism and get it right now!” She approached the nearby church, which told her that it would take several days because the pastor needed the approval of the governing board of that church! Meanwhile, the Lord had made it clear to her that it had to be “right now.” She simply left the church in debate, went into her home, filled the bath with water, pressed her head into the water with her whole body totally immersed, and said, “Bilquis, I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost!” [p.77]*

*Increasingly, we find that denominational church practices are warring against Christianity. Excessive attachment is given to the practices and interests of a particular denomination to the detriment of the Church of Christ. This phenomenon is called “Churchianity” [The World Book Dictionary, 1990]. In Northern Ireland, Christians form almost 90% of the population, yet there is no peace because the Roman Catholics and the Protestants are sworn enemies. The Trinity Broadcasting Network [TBN], the religious equivalent of the secular CNN, hardly features Roman Catholic services, just as its Roman Catholic counterpart, the EWTN, shuts out the Protestants. In Jerusalem, two sites are claimed to be the grave of Jesus Christ, depending on your denomination! Is Christ divided? What is happening to His Church on earth?*

*This is the subject we shall examine in today's lesson.*

## 1. Background: Brethren almost at war over an altar!

The descendants of Reuben, Gad and half of those of Manasseh had been allowed to settle on the Eastern side of the Jordan River while the remaining nine-and-a-half tribes settled on the Western side. One of the conditions that God gave for allowing that pattern of settlement was that both sides had to remain faithful to Him in obedience and true worship. The people had vowed it to Moses and reiterated it before Joshua [**Josh. 22: 1-6**]. The tabernacle of the congregation was set up in Shiloh on the Western side [**Josh. 18: 1**]. Since it signified the presence of God in their midst, Shiloh became the centre of worship for all the children of Israel.

One day, the leaders in the West heard that their brethren in the East had built themselves an altar to rival the one in Shiloh. They saw this as rebellion against God. They gathered troops to go and make war against their brethren on the Eastern side. Let us examine how the crisis was handled:

### a) *Investigating the true situation*

The Western elders did not order war first. Instead, they sent a high-powered delegation, made up of Phinehas, the son of Eleazer the priest, and ten princes, one from each of the Western tribes [**vv. 13-14**] to find out the true situation. They laid out the allegations against their Eastern brethren as follows:

- ✓ That they had *rebelled against God* by building another altar on the Eastern side [**v. 16**]
- ✓ That *their action was capable of bringing God's reprisals on all of them*, as had happened when the children of Israel allowed immoral relations with the pagan people in Peor [**Num. 25: 1**], or when Achan stole forbidden items in Jericho [**Josh. 7:1**]
- ✓ The Eastern tribes *could move over to the West to maintain the solidarity and unity of all the children of Israel* instead of rebelling against God by building a rival altar [**Josh. 22: 19**].

### b) *Explaining the true situation*

The Eastern tribes explained their action as follows:

- ✓ It was true that they had built an altar, but not out of rebellion or to offer burnt sacrifices on it [**v. 23**]
- ✓ They built it as *a memorial*, "that it may be a witness between us and you, and our generations after us, that we might do the service of the Lord before Him with our burnt offerings, and with our sacrifices, and with our peace offerings, that your

children may not say to our children in time to come, ye have no part in the Lord” [v. 27]

- ✓ They reiterated their faith in and fear of the Lord [vv. 22, 29].

c) *Accepting the truth*

The explanation pleased Phinehas and his team and they said, “This day we perceive that the Lord is among us, because ye have not committed this trespass against the Lord: now ye have delivered the children of Israel out of the hand of the Lord: now ye have delivered the children of Israel out of the hand of the Lord” [vv. 30-31]. The Western delegation went home to make their report that was also well received by the whole nation. Remarkably, the offending altar was not destroyed. Instead, it was named *Ed*, that is, “the Lord is God” [v. 34].

## 2. Lessons for the modern churches

You can see the evidence of *fear of God and true love* in the way that the congregation of Israel handled this matter. They communicated with the other side. They gave the benefit of the doubt to the erring side. They accepted the truth when they got it. If it were today, here is what we would have seen:

a) *Exclusive clubs*

In the computer business, you can buy any model provided it is compatible with other models. In modern Christianity, it is hardly like that. We all may use the Bible but there are as many versions as there are denominations! The Roman Catholic Bible has some books that you will not find in the Protestant bibles. *Denominational rules and regulations* dictate whether we close or open our eyes when we pray, how to confess our sins, on what days and at what times to come for service, or what constitutes “good conduct.” In some denominations, you have to repeat your water baptism before they regard you as their member! On one street in any Christian district, you can count so many different churches and yet, they are exclusive clubs to their members!

Even in the early church, the tendency had begun to build. The disciples of Jesus tried to make Him exclusive to themselves when they complained to Jesus, “Master, we saw one casting out devils in Thy name and he followeth not us; *but we forbid him because he followeth not us.*” Jesus stopped them by letting them know that whoever was not against Him was for Him [Mk 9: 38-39]. The church in Corinth experienced contentions because some claimed to be followers of Paul or Apollos or Peter or Christ. Paul had to remind them that only Christ was crucified on the cross! [1 Cor. 1: 10-13]. Paul also wrote to the Ephesians, “There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one

Lord, one faith, one baptism” [Eph. 4: 4-5]. Churchians need to be so reminded.

b) *Superiority complex*

I have had the privilege to worship in several denominations [orthodox, gospel/Pentecostal or spiritual churches] and they all share one thing in common. Each one feels and behaves as if it is superior to every one else! Whoever worships God anywhere else will not go to heaven! Their own interpretation of the word of God is the only true version. We measure church growth by the number of new members that we can draw away from other denominations, especially those that we consider keen rivals!

Paul withstood Peter in Antioch over his condescending attitude to the Gentiles. Before some Jews sent by James, one of the pillars of the Jerusalem leadership, came to Antioch, Peter ate with the Gentiles, considered unclean by the Jews because they were not circumcised. However, as soon as the Jerusalem team came, Peter withdrew and separated himself, “fearing them which were of the circumcision.” Even Barnabas and some other Jews followed in Peter’s footsteps. Paul rebuked them, saying, “a man is not justified by the *works of the law*, but by the *faith of Jesus Christ*, ... for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified” [Gal. 2: 11-16].

c) *Absence of Christian love or life*

A young Moslem from an Arab country once found himself in the same class in a British university with young people from all over the world. He soon discovered that two of his best friends were not on good terms with each other. One day, he invited both of them out. Over dinner, he asked his two Irish friends why they were not on speaking terms. One said that he was Catholic and the other said that he was Protestant. The confused Arab Moslem retorted, “But you are both Christians!” That summarises what churchianity has done to Christianity.

The word of God says, “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. *No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and His love is perfected in us*” [1 Jn 4: 10-12]. Jesus Himself taught His disciples, “A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. *By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples*” [Jn 13: 34-35]. The early church exhibited genuine love and exemplary Christian conduct. The believers “continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and *fellowship*, and in the breaking of bread and in prayers... All that believed were together, and *had all things in common*,

*... continuing daily with one accord, ... with gladness and singleness of heart.*” As a result, they found favour with God and “all the people” and “the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved” [**Acts 2: 42-47**]. The disciples, that is, the followers of Christ, exhibited such qualities before the Gentiles in Antioch and they called them “Christians” [**Acts 11:26**].

In the modern church, the discontent within each congregation may even amaze you. Divisions due to immorality, mismanagement, backbiting, doctrinal error, etc., are preferably put under the carpet rather than resolved. Outside of the walls of the church, there may be no social relations. In the absence of the Holy Spirit to make Jesus real in our daily living, pretended piety becomes the banner, and “Thou shalt not be caught” becomes the only commandment! How can you spread love to non-believers when even believers are love-starved?

It is no wonder that the doctrine of “separation of church and state” has been given new impetus by satanic forces. For example, the registered population of Christians in the United States is 192 million, that is, 68% of the total population [2000 Census]. Yet, you cannot pray in schools or mention God in most public places. A judge who boldly displayed the Ten Commandments in his courtroom is on the verge of losing his job. The ACLU (American Civil Liberties Union) is in court to get the word, “God,” removed from as many public institutions and documents as possible. So, are those 192 million people Christians or churchians?

### **3. Let us return to Christianity!**

Let us restate the obvious: a Christian is the true follower of Christ “for other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ” [**1 Cor. 3: 11**]. Therefore, any denominational foundations that take Christians away from focusing on Jesus, the author and finisher of their faith, are misleading them to churchianity and error.

Churchianity is not all wrong. Just as each school or club has its own rules and regulations, the overriding aim is to promote discipline and an enabling environment for effective results. For a good number of us who do not have the privilege at home or society to be disciplined (all in the name of democracy and freedom), the church can play a major role. Most times, there are good results. Today, there are genuine ministers and worshippers who have been groomed by their denominations. They are making commendable contributions as labourers in the Lord’s vineyard. However, there are also pretenders who have used the cloak of the church to promote their family enterprises and/or self-aggrandizement. These are the ones who are using Churchianity to fight against Christianity.

In order to return to the “good old days” of true Christianity, believers in *every denomination* should endeavour to do the following:

a) *Promote communication with all fellow believers*

Communication can break down walls of ignorance. Many missionaries have gone from Europe and America to Africa to teach the “backward peoples” about Jesus only to come back humbled by the high level of spiritual development there. In like manner, it is when Christians of different denominations interact and fellowship together that they come to appreciate that we have more things in common than divide us.

b) *Be open-minded, not empty-minded!*

An empty mind has nothing in it. Therefore, junk can be swept into it and the owner will not notice! Any belief or practice that you cannot find in or that contradicts the word of God is junk. An open mind, on the other hand, is very knowledgeable and alert. It does not allow junk to settle down but it is ready to accept whatever is better than is currently there. Christians are open-minded but churchians are empty-minded! That is why God told Joshua to meditate on the word of God day and night [**Josh. 1: 8**]. Those who delight in the law of God and meditate on it day and night are “like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season, ... and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper” [**Ps. 1: 2-3**]. Only a transformed mind can prove the will of God, what is good, acceptable and perfect [**Rom. 12:2**].

There is only one fold and one Shepherd, the Lord Jesus Christ [**Jn 10: 14-16**]. There is only one faith and one baptism from the one Lord Jesus who has through His Church [in different denominations and locations] distributed duties to us as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers [**Eph. 4: 5,6,11**]. Anything else is junk. God loves variety but hates confusion. Return to Christianity!