

A Book of Errors Revised (Marriage, Divorce)

By Hugo McCord

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My long time friend, John Edwards, in whose home in St. Louis I have been a guest, has a sympathetic heart toward people with marriage problems. But it is sinful to allow a sympathetic heart to alter Jesus' teaching, which he has done in his book *An In Depth Study Of Marriage And Divorce*. He sent me a copy, and I wrote to him to reconsider and to return to "the old paths" where he formerly walked.

Instead, in a second edition he has only revised the wording of his errors, saying that his book is intended to help those ... involved in divorce to realize that God still loves them, and they do not need to live lonely, guilt-ridden lives (p. 13).

It is true that God still loves them, and will forever, but "fornicators and adulterers God will judge" (Heb. 13:4). It is also true that fornicators and adulterers do not need to "live lonely, guilt-ridden lives," for "the Son of man has come to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10). When in penitence they hate adultery and turn from it, they will be perfectly forgiven (Acts 22:16; 1 Cor. 6:9-11) and will "rejoice in the Lord" (Phil. 4:4).

Everyone can go to heaven if he wants to do so, but Jesus said that some would have to "make themselves eunuchs" (Matt. 19:12). Apparently Jesus and John Edwards differ about that matter, for in a lengthy book of 203 pages John not once cited what Jesus said about eunuchs.

On page 15 John makes an admirable statement: "We need to search God's word for His answers." But immediately John

turns, away from His answers to an emotional appeal to the readers' heart to make them sympathize with the much married who have two or more sets of children, and wants the readers to despise any preacher who would refuse to baptize them. John the immerser refused to baptize those who did not quit their sinning (Matt. 3:8), but John Edwards will baptize those married and divorced for any reason. He makes preachers who respect Jesus' words about marriage and divorce worse than murderers, saying they are sending souls to hell!" He quotes a preacher as saying a woman who had had three husbands as having too many "to even think of going to heaven." The preacher was wrong. Any one can go to heaven who wants to do so, as I have already proved. I am sorry that John leaves the impression that the woman at Jacob's well who had had five husbands was on the way to heaven.

John calls undoing "past marital mistakes" an "Evil Tree, whose fruit is corrupt." But if, according to Jesus, a marital mistake causes one to "commit adultery" (Matt. 19:9), yes, to be living in adultery (Col. 3:5-7), what will make the tree and its fruit good? Paul tells how adulterers and homosexuals at Corinth made the tree and its fruit good: they "were washed were sanctified ... were justified" (1 Cor. 6:11).

Though God allowed David to keep Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11:27), and though God tolerated (cf. Acts 17:30) divorce for any cause and remarriage in the Old Testament (Deut. 24:1-4), and though he tolerated polygamy (2 Sam. 5:13; 1 Kings 11:3) in the Old Testament, that Old Testament has now been nailed to the cross (Col. 2:14). Then, the one of whom God said, "Hear ye him" (Matt. 17:5), made it clear that he repudiated polygamy (Matt. 19:4-5) and divorce (except for fornication) and remarriage (Matt. 19:9). What he said was directed to non-disciples (Matt. 19:3), but his disciples understood his "whosoever" as including everybody, and they were shocked, thinking that if marriage and divorce have such a rule, "it is not expedient to marry" (Matt. 19:10). John would have said that the number of

times one divorces and remarries does not matter (on p. 16 he cites an example of a woman who had six husbands).

However, Jesus thought that even one divorce and remarriage makes a difference, and that under some circumstances one must refrain from marriage, or quit a legal marriage, and make himself a eunuch by will power (Matt. 19:12).

On p. 18 John writes that the Bible says nothing about "adulterous marriages" or "living in adultery," but Matthew 19:9 is still in the Bible, saying that a certain divorcee on remarrying commits adultery, and Colossians 3:5-7 is still in the Bible, saying that some Colossians had formerly lived in adultery (cf. also Rom. 6:2; Eph. 2:3; Titus 3:3; 1 Pet. 4:2 on living in adultery).

On p. 18 John writes that "adultery in the gospel passages" is not "the physical sex act in marriage," but only "a violation of a covenant" (p. 50, and often). However, a covenant is broken in the first part of Matthew 19:9, "whosoever shall put away his wife." At the divorce he has broken his vow and his covenant, but according to Jesus (not John Edwards) he has not yet committed adultery, and does not until he remarries. Adultery in Jesus' eyes is not covenant breaking but is something that occurs after marriage.

On p. 21 John begins a discussion of Greek words, which is an admission that he needs something besides English translations to find his manufactured meaning of adultery. If we need to know Greek to understand marriage, billions of people are helpless.

In chapter 6 (p. 49-57) John, after citing figurative (Jer. 3:6-10) and mental adultery (Matt. 5:27-28), calls attention to the passive voice of *moicheuthenai* in Matthew 5:31-32. It is true the wife now discarded has not committed adultery, but in Jesus' eyes she has been "adulterated." The husband's breaking his covenant with her, Jesus does not call adultery,

but the husband has used her sexually and abandoned her, leaving her “adulterated.”

On p. 51 it is strange that John holds that *moichatai* in Matthew 19:9 is in the passive voice, for the verse would say, “Whosoever divorces his wife, except for fornication, and marries another, is adulterized.” Also he asserts that the same word in Mark 10:11 is in the passive voice, which would make the verse read, “Whosoever divorces his wife and marries another is adulterized against her.” Those senseless renditions do not appear if one says that *moichatai* is in the middle voice, calling for an active meaning, “he commits adultery,” and “he commits adultery against her.” The parallel in Luke 16:18 uses the active voice, *moicheuei*, “he commits adultery.” If one wants the whole truth, and is not simply trying to prove what he believes, he will by all means check the parallel readings in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. There is a way, by looking to ambiguous Greek grammar, and by checking only Matthew and Mark, to assert Matthew and Mark meant for *moichatai* to be taken as passive (though the resultant English translation is senseless) but the Greek grammar is not ambiguous in the word Luke wrote, *moicheuei*, and even John would say it could not be passive.

Further, to say that *moichatai* in Matthew 19:9 is point action (do you know of a commentator who says so?) would make adultery two legal steps (divorce and remarriage), and would declare that sex acts with the new spouse are not adultery. It is strange that Jesus used a word that commonly refers to a violation of the marriage bed and makes it refer only to two legal ceremonies. If the disciples listening to Jesus had understood that adultery is legal ceremonies, would they have said, “It is not expedient to marry”? According to John, it would be expedient to marry, with no risks involved: marriage would be easy to get into and out of. Some have seen a difficulty in giving *moichatai* a linear or durative meaning, because the physical act in adultery is not continuous.

However, the present tense in Greek not only can refer to point action (punctiliar) as in Matthew 13:14; 27:38, and to linear action (durative) as in Matthew 25:8; John 5:7, but also to iterative action (repetitive) as in Matthew 9:11, 14; 15:23; 1 Corinthians 15:31. Obviously if one is living in adultery the word iterative or repetitive is the correct description.

In John's search to find some proof of his thesis that adultery is covenant breaking, not sexual activity, he refers to Luke 16:18, "Every one who divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery." However, if only the divorcing and remarrying ceremonies are the adultery, then if an innocent spouse divorces a spouse for fornication and remarries, that innocent person has committed adultery, for he or she has gone through the legal ceremonies that constitute adultery.

On p. 67f John quotes Greek scholars as saying that sometimes the present tense is point or punctiliar action, but it is noticeable that he quotes no Greek scholar who says that such is true of *moichatai* and *moicheuei* in Matthew 19:9; Mark 10:11; Luke 16:18. Incidentally, John uses denominational terminology in saying that "Church of Christ teachers and leaders" take his position. One whom he quotes, Raymond Kelcy, says, "There's not a great deal to be had on the tense of that verb, Matthew 19:9," but John bases his whole thesis on the possibility that that verb might be punctiliar. Further, surprisingly, John quotes Kelcy, "A person who enters an illegal marriage, an unscriptural marriage, does continue to commit adultery," but according to John only the divorcing and remarrying constitute adultery, and that no one ever continues to commit adultery after marriage. Kelcy and John do not agree.

John quotes Carroll Osburn, but Osburn fails to say that Matthew 19:9 must be considered as punctiliar, yet John's thesis depends wholly on what Osburn does not say. Osburn holds that Matthew 19:9 is a "gnomic present," in which Osburn

says "continuity may or may not be involved." A "gnomic present," according to Ernest De Witt Burton, *Moods And Tenses*, p. 8, expresses "customary actions and general truths." So, Matthew 19:9 expresses the customary action and general truth that a remarrying divorcee (except for fornication) commits adultery. Osburn fails to help John.

John also quotes from Jack McKinney, and got some help, for McKinney said that Matthew 19:9 expresses "point action" (p. 70). However, McKinney contradicted himself, for he also said (as had Osburn) that Matthew 19:9 is a "gnomic present." He cannot be right both ways. If Matthew 19:9 speaks of "point action" it does not use the "gnomic present." McKinney also misused the word aoristic, apparently thinking it means point action. But the word aorist says that an act is unspecified as to the kind of action (whether punctiliar, repetitive, or durative). A gnomic present can be aoristic (no specification of the kind of action), but it cannot be punctiliar.

John pleads his case that Matthew 19:9 must be punctiliar, for he says that "the best Greek scholars" are with him, but none that he quoted says that Matthew 19:9 must be punctiliar. Then John (p. 73) quotes a Greek grammar that "simultaneous action relative to the main verb is ordinarily expressed by the present," but in the case of Matthew 19:9; Mark 10:11; Luke 16:18 the action of the main verb is not ordinary: the action of the main verb is not simultaneous with the divorcing and the remarrying, for those actions are only legal ceremonies, and no lexicon or dictionary defines adultery as a legal ceremony. Adultery, a violation of the marriage bed, is not committed by divorcing and remarrying, but later. To interpret the gospel verses as point action is to eliminate adultery, for it is not committed in two legal ceremonies.

How refreshing in John's book to come to chapter nine, "Homosexual Marriages" (p. 75-79). He is clear how sinful they are. But he is inconsistent. Homosexuals and lesbian marriage partners can appeal to John in exactly the same way he pleads

with his readers to approve those divorced and remarried unscripturally. I can hear homosexuals and lesbians turning John's words against himself: "Are we condemning people whom God wants to forgive? ... let love and compassion rule over legalistic rules and judgments". (p. 18). They would say the same thing that John says, "Far worse than taking someone's life is sending their souls to hell! Christians, are you prepared to answer for the fruits of your teaching (against homosexuality) that drives people to hell?" (p. 16-17).

John is certain (p. 83) that God wants monogamy, and that Jesus pointed back to monogamy, but John on the mission field today would not teach polygamists to go back to monogamy.

John (p. 89) asks does divorce break the marriage? Legally of course it does, but it does not nullify the vow one made at his marriage to his spouse "until death doth us part." John's words on p. 93 have relevance here: "Our oral words mean just as much to God as our written documents." Jesus, not John, taught that a divorced person is not as free as a single person, for if a divorced (not for fornication) person marries, he commits fornication. Single people and divorced people are equal legally, but not in Jesus' eyes. John and Jesus disagree.

John (p. 95) says that "God recognizes the marriage dissolved when the spouse deserts the marriage," but Paul did not say that. In Paul's inspired words a deserted spouse does not any longer have a sexual obligation (a voluntary bondage, cf. 1 Corinthians 7:3-4, 15) to the former mate, but to interpret a deserted spouse (no fornication involved) as free to marry again is to contradict the Lord Jesus. Jesus did not give two reasons for divorce and remarriage, namely, fornication and/or desertion. Paul gave a release from marital obligation but he did not give a remarrying privilege.

It is refreshing to come to John's chapter fifteen, as he exposes the sins of pornography. But in the rest of his book

(p. 123-203) he is even more determined to prove a non-dictionary, arbitrary, self-made meaning of adultery, a meaning that will give comfort and peace to people that Jesus said are living in adultery. I would not want to be in John's shoes in the Day of Judgment. To destroy a weak brother or sister, for whom Christ died, is no light matter (1 Cor. 8:11). The first part of Romans 16:18 is not true of John and Olan Hicks, but the second part is true: "By their smooth and fair speech they beguile the hearts of the innocent."

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Holy Spirit in the New Testament

By H. A. (Buster) Dobbs
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- I. Introduction
 - A. The writers of the Old Testament looked for a time when the Holy Spirit would do a greater work than was done in their day.
 - B. They stressed the importance of words that would be spoken and written because of the work of the Holy Spirit. Consider the importance of the words of revelation.
 - 1. "The Spirit of the Lord Jehovah is upon me; because Jehovah hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are

bound; to proclaim the year of Jehovah's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them a garland for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of Jehovah, that he may be glorified" (Isa. 61:1-3).

- 2. The context of this passage shows these words were spoken to Judah before the Babylonian captivity and refer to the restoration and rebuilding of Jerusalem and the temple but have a second and ultimate fulfillment in Jesus (See Luke 4:16-21). The message was from "the Spirit of the Lord Jehovah."
- C. The power and importance of the revealed word is emphasized. The word heard, revealed, preached, believed and obeyed is dominant.
 - 1. Matthew 4:12-17 and Isaiah 9:1-2— Jesus began to preach.
 - 2. Matthew 11:2-6; Isaiah 35:5-10—gospel is preached.
 - 3. Matthew 12:15-21 and Isaiah 42:1-4—Jehovah's servant shall declare judgment.
 - 4. Matthew 13:14-17 and Isaiah 6:9-10— see, hear, believe.
 - 5. Matthew 13:35 and Psalms 78:1-3— teach and reveal.
 - 6. Luke 4:16-21 and Isaiah 61:1-3—preach good tidings.
 - 7. John 12:37-41 and Isaiah 53:1; Isaiah 6:9-10—a message is to be believed.
- D. The Bible deals with the message more than the messenger. The real messenger was the Holy Spirit,

and, being God, he is deep, inscrutable, and incomprehensible, but we can grasp the words the Holy Spirit revealed.

- II. The Holy Spirit and the Word in the New Testament

- A. John the Baptist was a forerunner.

- 1. He was filled with the Holy Spirit from birth (Luke 1:15).
 - 2. He was to prepare the way for Messiah (Isaiah 40:3).
 - 3. He would turn the hearts of the people to God (Malachi 4:5-6).
 - 4. He did his work by exhortation and preaching (Luke 3:18)

- B. The work of Jesus was planned by God.

- 1. "He that hath received his witness hath set his seal to this, that God is true. For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for he giveth not the Spirit by measure. The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand. He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life; but he that obeyeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:34-36).

- a) Note: Jesus is the one God sent. Jesus spoke the words of God: for (the reason is) he (God) giveth not the Spirit by measure. Obviously, the one who spoke the words of God, is the one who received the Spirit without measure—Jesus received the spirit without measure.

- b) Others must have received the Spirit by measure; otherwise it does not make sense to say Jesus had an immeasurable measure of the Spirit.

- 2. Emphasis was put on the teaching (the

words) of Jesus: "Never man so spake" (John 7:46).

- a) "The multitudes were astonished at his teaching" (Matt. 7:28).
- b) "Hear ye him" (Matt. 17:5).
- c) "Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46).
- d) "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me in that y, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy by thy name, and by thy name cast out demons, and by thy name do many mighty works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity. Every one therefore that heareth these words of mine, and doeth them, shall be likened unto a wise man, who built his house upon the rock" (Matt. 7:21-24).
- e) "It is the spirit that giveth life; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I have spoken unto you are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:63).
- f) "No man can come to me, except the Father that sent me draw him: and I will raise him up in the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall all be taught of God. Every one that hath heard from the Father, and hath learned, cometh unto me. Not that any man hath seen the Father, save he that is from God, he

hath seen the Father” (John 6:44-46).

- g) “Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I came forth and am come from God; for neither have I come of myself, but he sent me. Why do ye not understand my speech? Even because ye cannot hear my word. Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father it is your will to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and standeth not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father thereof. But because I say the truth, ye believe me not. Which of you convicteth me of sin? If I say truth, why do ye not believe me? He that is of God heareth the words of God: for this cause ye hear them not, because ye are not of God” (John 8:42-47)
- h) “If ye had known me, ye would have known my Father also: from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him. Philip saith unto him, Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and dost thou not know me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; how sayest thou, Show us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? The words that I say unto you I speak not from myself: but the Father abiding in me doeth his works” (John 14:7-10; Amos 1:1). Daniel said, ‘

‘heard I the voice of his words” (Dan. 10:9). Balaam said, ‘ ‘The word that God putteth in my mouth, that shall I speak” (Num. 22:38).

Comments on the Outline

God instructs the people of earth through the medium of words. The Holy Spirit used words in instructing chosen leaders who repeated the words to the public. The words would sometimes come to the receiver through the eye, at other times through the ear, and occasionally the words were put in the mouth, but the message always came in the signs and symbols of ideas and was communicated to the people in words.

“The words of Amos, who was among the herdsmen of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel....” (Amos 1:1). Daniel said, “heard I the voice of his words” (Dan. 10:9). Balaam said, “The word that God putteth in my mouth, that shall I speak” (Num. 22:38).

The Bible stresses the importance of inspired writings. The New Testament says the Holy Spirit influences human minds through a medium, except in some miracles—*miracles confined to the first century*.

God made the world by the creative power of his spoken word. God said, “Let there be light, and there was light.” God said, “Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters.” God said, “Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together unto one place.” God said, “Let the earth put forth grass, herbs yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit after their kind, wherein is the seed thereof, upon the earth: and it was so.” God spoke, and it was done. “By faith we understand that the worlds have been framed by the word of God” (Heb. 11:3).

“... It is God, that said, Light shall shine out of darkness, who shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge

of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6). Paul's argument is that the same God who called light out of darkness in the beginning, demonstrated how weighty and mighty his word is, by giving the revelation of his gospel of salvation. We dare not ignore nor belittle it.

The force of God's word is well documented in the Bible. The gospel is God's power to save (Rom. 1:16). Still, some misguided souls call it "the mere word" and "the dead letter." Those who faithfully follow the teaching of the Bible are called strict constructionists and legalists. These terms are used in derision and are not unlike the Jews' calling Jesus a Samaritan to disgrace him. Jesus set the proper response pattern for us when he discounted their slap by saying they dishonored him and pointed out that he was doing his Father's will, but they were not so disposed. The apostle argues we do not handle the word of God deceitfully. ..The gods of this world blind the minds of the unbelieving to prevent them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ...We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the exceeding greatness of the power may be of God" (2 Cor. 4:1-7). He calls the scriptures "the word of God...the gospel of the glory of Christ...a treasure...an exceeding great power."

We do not war according to the flesh, but "casting down imaginations, and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ; and being in readiness to avenge all disobedience, when your obedience shall be made full" (2 Cor. 10:5-6).

Our obedience is to be full, complete, perfect. It is the Comforter—the Holy Spirit—who gives to us divine revelation. "Wherefore, even as the Holy Spirit saith, Today if ye shall hear his voice" (Heb. 3:7). "Brethren, it was needful that the scripture should be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spake before by the mouth of David concerning Judas" (Acts 1:16). "The Spirit of Jehovah spake by me, And his word was upon my

tongue" (2 Sam. 23:2). "But the Spirit saith expressly, that in later times some shall fall away from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons" (1 Tim. 4:1).

The word of truth revealed by the Holy Spirit is sufficient and adequate to make sinners acceptable to God. We are not to follow the ambiguous leadings of doubtful feelings but are to submit to the absolute standard of scripture inspired of God.

"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4).

"Thy will be done, as in heaven, so on earth" (Matt. 6:10).

"The law of Jehovah is perfect, restoring the soul: The testimony of Jehovah is sure, making wise the simple" (Psalms 19:7).

"For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that through patience and through comfort of the scriptures we might have hope" (Rom. 15:4).

"And that from a babe thou hast known the sacred writings which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness. That the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work" (2 Tim. 3:15-17)

"It is the spirit that giveth life; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I have spoken unto you are spirit, are life" (John 6:63).

"For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and of death" (Rom. 8:2).

"But he that looketh into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and so continueth, being not a hearer that forgetteth but a

doer that worketh, this man shall be blessed in his doing" (James 1:25).

"For the word of God is living, and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and quick to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Heb. 4:12).

"But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deluding your own selves" (James 1:22).

"Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures" (James 1:18).

"Seeing ye have purified your souls in your obedience to the truth unto unfeigned love of the brethren, love one another from the heart fervently: having been begotten again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, through the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever, For, all flesh is as grass, and all the glory thereof as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower falleth: But the word of the Lord abideth for ever. And this is the word of good tidings which was preached unto you" (1 Peter 1:22-25).

"For seeing that in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom knew not God, it was God's good pleasure through the foolishness of the preaching to save them that believe" (1 Cor. 1:21).

"Wherefore putting away all filthiness and overflowing of wickedness, receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls" (James 1:21).

John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth finished their God-given assignments through the power of words. The overriding importance of the message is prominent in the God-given scriptures (writings). As we look at the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the apostles of Jesus, certain

disciples in the first century, and all the saved, we will understand more fully the Spirit's work of revealing, confirming, and protecting the plan of salvation as given in the new covenant.

"Now I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give {you} the inheritance among all them that are sanctified" (Acts 20:32).

Inexcusable Excuses

By Terry R. Townsend

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Have you ever thought about what folks might say to God at judgment for their failure to obey him? It's sobering, isn't it, to know there's a coming judgment – a day in which all men will give account of themselves to the Lord! Paul writes, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10). Let's consider a few inexcusable excuses.

Without question, millions of people will blame their lack of obedience on preachers. Unfortunately, millions today put more faith in mortal man than they do God. Yet, the Bible is abundantly clear that one must be a doer of the word and not a hearer only (James 1:21-25). False teachers are deceiving millions into thinking they have "peace and safety," when in reality they're on a collision course with destruction (1 Thess. 5:1-3; 2 Pet. 2:1-3). Thus, it behooves us to test the spirits (1 John 4:1; Acts 17:11). Blaming false teachers at Judgment will be an inexcusable excuse.

There will be many on the Day of Judgment blaming the weather for their lack of involvement in the Lord's work. When asked why they fail to participate in spiritual activities, many blame mother nature – too hot in summer, too cold in winter, too wet in spring, too windy in fall, etc. If truth be told, people will do whatever their hearts so desire! Inclement weather does not negate one's responsibility to serve God (1 Cor. 15:58). Blaming the weather at Judgment will be an inexcusable excuse.

Undoubtedly, millions will blame their parents at Judgment for their failure to do God's will. How often have I heard non-members say the following in a Bible study, "I see what you're saying, but if what I believe was good enough for dad and mom, it's good enough for me!" But what if dad and mom were wrong? Will God still grant you entrance into Heaven despite your failure to obey that which you knew to be true? The Bible says that one must obey Christ above all else, including family (cf. Luke 9:57-62; 14:26-35). In matters of faith, who should we ultimately listen to? Parents or Christ? Obviously, the answer is Jesus (Matt. 17:5; Heb. 1:1-3). Putting the blame on parents for your lack of obedience will be an inexcusable excuse.

Others at Judgment will use the excuse of profession for their failing to do the Father's Will. I'm sure some will say, "I would have obeyed and served you Lord, but my job wouldn't allow it." Truth be told, millions are more interested in money than they are in God. Paul had it right when he penned, "But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs" (1 Tim. 6:9-10 ESV). Jesus said that we're to "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Matt. 6:33). To blame one's profession at Judgment will be an

inexcusable excuse.

I'm sure that on Judgment Day some will use their lack of earthly substance (poverty) as an excuse for their failing to do the will of God. Some will probably say, "Lord, I wasn't as blessed as others; thus, I didn't do all I could." I wonder if God will have standing beside Him the widow who gave two mites as an example to those making such excuses (cf. Mark 12:41-44)? The Lord expects us to do what we can with what we have (Matt. 25:14 ff). Blaming our lack of service on poverty will be an inexcusable excuse.

Another excuse many will make at Judgment will be that of persecution. I can hear some now, "Lord, I would've served You, but I didn't because I feared persecution." But didn't he tell us in his word that Christians would be mistreated on occasion (cf John 15:20; 2 Tim. 3:12). Didn't he assure us his presence, protection, and panoply to help us overcome (cf. Matt. 28:20; Heb. 13:5-6; Eph. 6:10 ff)? Jesus said, "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt. 10:28). Thus, fear of persecution as a defense for failing to obey God will be an inexcusable excuse on Judgment Day.

Finally, millions will offer unto God the excuse of procrastination; that is, many will say, "I wanted to obey You Lord, but I simply ran out of time!" I wonder if Felix will be among the masses who will make such an excuse (Acts 24:25)? The Lord is patient, and he gives men ample time to obey (cf. 2 Pet. 3:9-14); thus, to use procrastination as a reason for failing to obey will be an inexcusable excuse on Judgment Day.

Simply put, we can make all the excuses we want to as to why we fail to do God's Will; however, on the Day of Judgment, God's answer to such excuses will be this:

"Depart from me, ye that work iniquity!"

Miracles of the Bible

By H. A. (Buster) Dobbs

The idea of a miracle holds fascination for many people because it is charged with enigma. Strange and unknown things somehow appeal to the human psyche. Everybody talks about miracles but few know what they are talking about. The first step in discussing miracles is to say what we are talking about and note what we are not talking about. The purpose of this study is to consider the miracles of the Bible. We are not surveying unusual events in the human experience that some wrongly call miracles and that have no connection with the Word of God. Things like Unidentified Flying Objects and little green men with antennae coming out of their heads and long, snake-like fingers, and squeaky voices are figment and not miracle. Neither are we discussing the magician's tricks. Furthermore, not every strange thing that is difficult to explain is a miracle.

The word "miracle" in the New Testament translates two Greek words. These two words are variously translated "miracle, sign, token, wonder, ability, power, might, strength, violence, and virtue." The King James translators use the word 37 times. The American Standard translators use the word only 9 times. Often where the King James translates "miracle" the American Standard uses the word "sign." A miracle is a sign, but not every sign is a miracle.

The New Testament speaks of signs or miracles performed by agency of the devil. In warning of a coming apostasy, Paul wrote: Now we beseech you, brethren, touching the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together unto him; to the end that ye be not quickly shaken from your mind, nor yet be troubled, either by spirit, or by word, or by epistle as

from us, as that the day of the Lord is just at hand; let no man beguile you in any wise: for it will not be, except the falling away come first, and the man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition, he that opposeth and exalteth himself against all that is called God or that is worshipped; so that he sitteth in the temple of God, setting himself forth as God. Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? And now ye know that which restraineth, to the end that he may be revealed in his own season. For the mystery of lawlessness doth already work: only there is one that restraineth now, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall be revealed the lawless one, whom the Lord Jesus shall slay with the breath of his mouth, and bring to nought by the manifestation of his coming; even he, whose coming is according to the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceit of unrighteousness for them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God sendeth them a working of error, that they should believe a lie (2 Thess. 2:1-11). The lawless one would come with the power of Satan to perform signs and lying wonders. In the book of Revelation the miraculous power of evil spirits is mentioned. "And he doeth great signs (miracles), that he should even make fire to come down out of heaven upon the earth in the sight of men" (Rev 13:13).

"And he deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by reason of the signs (miracles) which it was given him to do in the sight of the beast; saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast who hath the stroke of the sword and lived" (Rev. 13:14). "For they are spirits of demons, working signs (miracles); which go forth unto the kings of the whole world, to gather them together unto the war of the great day of God, the Almighty" (Rev. 16:14). "And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought the signs (miracles) in his sight, wherewith he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast and them that

worshipped his image: they two were cast alive into the lake of fire that burneth with brimstone" (Rev. 19:20). Malignant spirits, under the control of the great Red Dragon, were able to perform wonders and signs to deceive people and bring them under the power of the Prince of Darkness. When the empire of Satan is utterly crushed by the heavenly army of the Captain of our salvation, these wonder working spirits will be cast into the lake that burns with fire and brimstone.

In the book of Acts we are told of a pretender to magic powers who amazed the people with his sorcery. "But there was a certain man, Simon by name, who beforetime in the city used sorcery, and amazed the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is that power of God which is called Great. And they gave heed to him, because that of long time he had amazed them with his sorceries" (Acts 8:8-11). Simon of Samaria was a charlatan, but the people were fooled. His humbug was effective. He was a fraud, but the people didn't know it. The great and the small in the city of Samaria thought Simon was the real thing. They jumped on his bandwagon.

This Samaritan, Simon, was a conscious agent for Satan, and knew he was using trickery to deceive the people. Every generation produces swindlers who exploit gullible people eager to believe in voodooism. It is strange that people would rather accept claptrap than truth. The kind of signs these people do cannot favorably compare with bona fide miracles. Philip, a preacher of righteousness, came to Samaria and when the people of Samaria "heard and saw" the signs which he did they knew they had been bamboozled by Simon.

"And the multitudes gave heed with one accord unto the things that were spoken by Philip, when they heard, and saw the signs which he did. For from many of those that had unclean spirits, they came out, crying with a loud voice: and many that were palsied, and that were lame, were healed. And there was much

joy in that city" (Acts 8:6-8).

Satan has real power and can pull wool over the eyes of sincere folks. We need to be alert to this and not allow ourselves to be hoodwinked by quacks. To be guided by astrology, Tarot cards, alchemy, palm readers, and fortune-tellers is about as sensible as making life-changing decisions on the basis of a message found in a Chinese after-dinner-cookie.

In the first century, the devil was allowed to use his mystical power without limit. The wonder-working power of God was also fully unleashed. There was a great contest. The supernatural power of God was arrayed against the supernatural power of the devil. The devil lost! Demon possession of Bible times was a display of Satan's power. In the case of the woman with the "spirit of infirmity," we are told that Satan had bound her for eighteen years (Luke 13:16). The maid with "a spirit of divination" was a tool of evil spirits (Acts 16:16-18). Every time demons came into contact with one having the supernatural power of God, the demon lost. In each case, the demon was cast out. In one case, demons were sent into a herd of swine (Matt. 8:31-32). They could not predominate in the presence of divine omnipotence.

Satan was defeated. Jesus' victory over death was the final blow. Evil was pulverized. The terms of surrender were dictated by the conquering Christ. He who used his power to bind many was himself bound. Wherefore he saith, When he ascended on high, he led captivity captive, And gave gifts unto men" (Eph. 4:8). "And he laid hold on the dragon, the old serpent, which is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and cast him into the abyss, and shut it, and sealed it over him, that he should deceive the nations no more, until the thousand years should be finished: after this he must be loosed for a little time" (Rev. 20:2-3). The vanquished Satan will never again be allowed to use his supernatural power to afflict humanity. God also restricts his

power to natural means by his own choice. We have the sweet assurance that "there hath no temptation taken you but such as man can bear: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation make also the way of escape, that ye may be able to endure it" (1 Cor. 10:13).

Having looked at fake miracles and having considered Satanic signs, we now consider the miracles performed by the power of God that are recorded in the New Testament. A study of supernatural acts executed by divine power will demonstrate the nature of miracles performed in the name of God. There are several conditions that determine what constitutes a miracle performed by the power of the Creator. First, the heavenly miracles of the first century were always successful. No applicant for miraculous healing in the days of Jesus and the apostles ever went away disappointed. And the report of him went forth into all Syria: and they brought unto him all that were sick, holden with divers diseases and torments, possessed with demons, and epileptic, and palsied; and he healed them (Matt. 4:24). "And when even was come, they brought unto him many possessed with demons: and he cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all that were sick" (Matt. 8:16). "And Jesus perceiving it withdrew from thence: and many followed him; and he healed them all" (Matt. 12:15). "And he came forth, and saw a great multitude, and he had compassion on them, and healed their sick" (Matt. 14:14). "And there came unto him great multitudes, having with them the lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and they cast them down at his feet; and he healed them" (Matt. 15:30). "And when the sun was setting, all they that had any sick with divers diseases brought them unto him; and he laid his hands on every one of them, and healed them" (Luke 4:40).

There were no failures! No one ever went away from a "healing service" of Jesus or the apostles still sick, possessed, or bound. We are told of an epileptic the disciples of Jesus

could not heal, but the Lord healed him (Matt. 17:15-18). There was no failure in this situation. Jesus, we are told, "did not many mighty works" in Nazareth (Matt. 13:58). The reason he did not do many miracles in his hometown was not that he could not do it, but the people did not believe him and therefore did not come to him for healing. He was not going to break their doors down to demonstrate his divine credentials. If a person wants to reject Jesus, he is allowed to do it. This, obviously, does not constitute failure, but lack of opportunity.

There never was a failure. So, the first thing we learn is that God-authorized miracles never fail. No sufferer who applied to Jesus or his disciples for healing was told that his lack of faith caused the cure not to materialize. Second, the cure was always perfect. No person was ever partially cured. If God heals supernaturally, the cure must be complete, or the power of God is inadequate. It is true that on one occasion at Bethsaida a blind man was brought to Jesus with a request that he be healed (Mark 8:22). Jesus "spit on his eyes" and said "Seest thou aught" (Mark 8:23). The man answered, "I see men, for I behold them as trees, walking" (Mark 8:24). Jesus laid his hands upon the man and he "saw all things clearly" (Mark 8:25). Why Jesus healed this man in stages I do not know, but it is true that the blind man never left the presence of Jesus until he "saw all things clearly." In supernatural healing there is never a period of recuperation. The sick person does not begin to get better and over a period of weeks or months or years finally recover health. Miracles of healing always take place instantly. Third, there was no relapse. There is not a single instance in all of the New Testament where any person healed by the power of God ever suffered from the same complaint. A blind person who received his sight did not at a later time retrogress to darkness. The miracles of Jesus and the apostles were long lasting. Fourth, it was instantaneous. There was no waiting period. The cure was always abrupt.

“Now Peter and John were going up into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour. And a certain man that was lame from his mother’s womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the door of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple; who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked to receive an alms. And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him, with John, said, Look on us. And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something from them. But Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but what I have, that give I thee. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk. And he took him by the right hand, and raised him up: and immediately his feet and his ankle-bones received strength. And leaping up, he stood, and began to walk; and he entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God: and they took knowledge of him, that it was he that sat for alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him” (Acts 3:1-10). The God-authorized miracles of the New Testament were always without failure, or setback, perfect, and immediate. Anything that purports to be a miracle but that does not have these earmarks is not a God-authorized miracle. It may be a man-made fraud, it may be a Satan inspired fake, but it is not an act of God.

The miracles performed by approval of Jehovah in the New Testament were for the purpose of confirming revelation. God spoke through his appointed representatives and then sealed the message by signs and wonders. Nicodemus said to Jesus, “no one can do these signs that thou doest, except God be with him” (John 3:2). Nicodemus was right about that! The message of the New Testament is confirmed by signs and wonders. “God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders, and by manifold powers, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to his own will” (Heb. 2:4). If God performed miracles today, they would be available to all and would not be selective. “God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34). They would be

immediate and perfect and there would be no regression. The purpose of God's miracles was to confirm his word. "God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders, and by manifold powers, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to his own will" (Heb. 2:4). "And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word by the signs that followed. Amen" (Mark 16:20). When that purpose was realized, miracles ceased. Satan is defeated. The truth is established. Miracles are no more. They are not needed. If miracles had remained after the truth of the gospel was certified to be of God, then many people would follow Jesus for the wrong reason. If believers are put under a glass and protected from sickness and hurting, many would come to Jesus for the loaves and fishes. We are cautioned to not labor for the meat that is perishing, but for that which endures to eternal life (John 6:27).

"If then ye were raised together with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are upon the earth. For ye died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall be manifested, then shall ye also with him be manifested in glory" (Col. 3:1-4).