

On The Frontier

“For the glory of God and the furtherance of the Gospel”

Modern Trends In Paganism Part Three

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In order to be on the cutting edge of twenty first century culture one must fully embrace the postulations of the "me" generation. Today, men and women strive unrelentingly to better themselves. The motivation for this is launched from the premise of building "self-worth." But bettering oneself for the sole sake of betterment can be frustrating and disappointing (not to mention self-serving and idolatrous). Especially since society measures an individuals worth by good looks, intelligence and wealth. A realistic look at life tells us that both good looks and intelligence are inherited. Either they're in your gene pool or they're not. But society is empathetic, a lack of good looks and or intelligence can be compensated for with more wealth. Yes, you can be as dumb as a box of rocks and twice as ugly, if you're rich, you're righteous. And righteousness is what man craves. But where's the focus in all this? Me, me, me, self, self, self. Though no one would like to be thought of as selfish, it's clear that's exactly what's being promoted. Those who lead the "righteous-starved" into this form of paganism are *avant-garde* to be sure. They are the modern vanguards of idolatry and they shall receive a wage commensurate with their labor. But make no mistake, those who head up these columns are smart. They know how to use the desire for

righteousness as bait on the lure, hooking men into the vain pursuit of self-gratification. Leading man to think that self-development is the noblest of callings. This is nothing more than confidence in the flesh, a fragile and foolhardy trust at best.

Philippians 3:1-14

Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you, to me indeed *is* not grievous, but for you *it is* safe.

Beware of dogs [a figure of speech referring to "backstabbers"], beware of evil workers, beware of the concision [those who promoted circumcision as the means to righteousness].

For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.

What magnificent truths! For those of us who recognize this, the flesh holds no interest.

Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more:

Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee;

Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the

righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

Man, talk about success! The Apostle Paul had risen to levels in his religion that others could only dream about. Yet, look at what's recorded in the next verse.

But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.

Yea doubtless, and I count all things *but* loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them *but* dung, that I may win Christ,

And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:

That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;

If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.

Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.

Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but *this* one

thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before,

I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

The prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus is the noblest of all. How thankful we should be to have the privilege of such a pursuit! Furthermore, it's evident from this passage that this isn't about you and it isn't about me. It's about Him. It's about the Lord God Almighty and His Christ. There's nothing "selfish" about it. It's also clear from this passage that man's yearning to be made righteous can only be satisfied in Christ.

Look again at the comparison drawn by the revelation given the Apostle Paul.

Verses 7-9

But what things were gain to me [referring to being blameless as touching the righteousness which is in the law], those I counted loss for Christ.

Yea doubtless, and I count all things *but* loss [personal achievements towards righteousness] for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them *but* dung, that I may win Christ,

And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:

Paul considered all of his personal accomplishments to be dung when compared to the righteousness which is of God. It isn't about what we accomplish, it's about what Christ accomplished. Our exploits are of little worth when compared to his. It's about God and His Son and (thankfully for us) His family. Him, Him, Him, not me, me, me.

The Lord Jesus Christ set the standard and remains the example for all to follow.

John 5:30

I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me.

John 6:38

For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me.

John 8:29

And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him.

Even with the prospect of the most gruesome of deaths facing him, he remained true to the Father and mankind.

Luke 22:39-42

And he came out, and went, as he was wont, to the mount of Olives; and his disciples also followed him.

And when he was at the place, he said unto them, Pray that ye enter not into temptation.

And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and

kneeled down, and prayed,

Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me [the horrible death he knew was confronting him]: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.

Given his example of valiant obedience, how can we ignore the admonition to do likewise?

Philippians 2:1-11

If *there be* therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies,

Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, *being* of one accord, of one mind.

Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.

Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.

Doesn't the entire concept of "self" seem ludicrous in light of all this? With this knowledge, how can we focus solely on our own advancement?

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:

Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:

But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:

And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name:

That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of *things* in heaven, and *things* in earth, and *things* under the earth;

And *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

What an honor to follow in his steps!!! How pallid the pursuit for personal excellence is when viewed in the light of the Lord's brilliant example of selflessness.

Sadly, purpose turned disturbingly for Christianity when the Church embraced this worldly pursuit for "self-development." Which in and of itself isn't necessarily vain, given the proper motivation. For instance, it's a good thing if (in your quest to develop self) your goal is the furtherance of the Gospel. But, much is left to be desired when ambitions are exclusive to further the cause of self. I'm all in favor of the development of talent and ability. But, this three decade old trend to benefit self is sickening. In the last thirty years (thanks to the merchants, media and medical profession) magazines, classes and new discoveries have found their ways into our homes and into our Churches. The former is understandable, the latter inexcusable. Consider the validity of self-improvement in light of what Jesus Christ had to say.

Luke 14:25,26

And there went great multitudes with him: and he turned, and said unto them,

If any *man* come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.

If anything is more important to you than Christ, you cannot be his disciple. A disciple is a disciplined one. How can you be disciplined for the Master if the words, thoughts and desires of others are of more importance to you than his are? If what my wife says or wants holds greater sway in my life than the words and desires of Jesus Christ, it's not possible for me to be his disciple. Lest we forget, it isn't only father, mother, wife, brethren and sisters, " ... his own life" is also factored in. Nothing must stand between us and him. Our loyalty must be to his wishes before it is to anyone else's including (and most especially) our own. We must never allow our selfish desires to supplant the obedience of faith. In a word, we must "die to self." After all, if we're Christian, we agreed to God's conditions for salvation.

Romans 10:9,10

That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

Jesus is Lord! I readily accepted that! How about you? Well, if he is

Lord, than I'm not. Neither are you. It's not about me or you, it's about him. Self has no place in keeping the Lordship of Jesus Christ alive in your heart. Either he's first or he's last. Either he's Lord, or you are. And if you are then Satan is. That's right! There's no middle ground, no grey area. Do you remember the old Bob Dylan ballad, "You've Got To Serve Someone?" I wonder if he knows just how accurate some of the lyrics are. "It might be the Devil or it might be the Lord, but you've got to serve someone." Forgive me for any inaccuracies in my plagiaristic use of Mr. Dylan's work, but I'm certain you get the idea.

Romans 6:16-18

Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?

There's no fence to sit on. It's all one way or the other.

But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you.

Yes, thank God and praise His holy name for ever and ever.

Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.

What better life could we lead? It's a wonderful honor to serve our God and His Son.

The following is a verse that brings tears to my eyes. I'll bet it tugs at your heart also.

John 10:10

The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.

As a wise man once said, "This verse is like diamonds set on black velvet." What a shame that this verse and others like it have been used to appeal to man's desire for personal gain. While it's true that those who believe God's Word never want for anything, this is not the meaning of this particular verse. Not if Jesus spoke the truth as recorded in the following:

Luke 12:15

And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.

The life that Jesus Christ came to bring, the more abundant life, is spiritual. This life can only be enjoyed as we submit ourselves to God and to His Word. Only then can we be truly free.

John 8:31,32

Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, *then* are ye my disciples indeed;

And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

As we continue in His Word we are his disciples. And then we know the Truth and then we are made free. It's not about our word, it's about His.

Psalms 37:4

Delight thyself also in the LORD;

and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.

What do you think this verse is talking about? Will He give you everything your little heart desires? Or will He give your heart desires that are godly?

Today's Churches are brimming over with the message of self. From weight loss to memory enhancement. Yet little is in harmony with God's true plan.

Matthew 10:37-39

He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

And he that taketh not his cross [shoulders his responsibility], and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.

He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.

Either what Jesus Christ had to say (as we've just read) is true, or the messages of self-help and self-development are. I just have to go with Jesus. How about you? That being the case, I'd hate to wake up one morning and realize that I had mislead God's people. There's no time like the present to preach the truth of this. We must "die to self" so we can live for Him. It's not about us, it's about Him. Having said this, I think it expedient to remind you that when you relinquish all to Him, He takes care of everything else. Happiness is never again in jeopardy as God meets all needs. Even the concerns that accompany our daily requirements are no longer ours but

His.

I'm not suggesting that you strive to be corpulent and absent-minded. Priority is the key. He must be our first love. Nothing dare take His place.

John 12:25,26

He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.

If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will *my* Father honour.

Mark 10:29,30

And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's,

But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life.

We have nothing to lose and everything to gain both now and in eternity. You will notice that the Lord's message differs considerably from those who preach on "the anointing to get wealth."

Mark 8:34-37

And when he had called the people *unto him* with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his

cross, and follow me.

For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it.

For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?

Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

In the end, what really is important? Are we to be deceived into thinking as do the epicureans? Eat drink and be merry, for tomorrow we may die. Is that what life is all about? It is if we put "self" at the center.

I Timothy 6:3-19

If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, *even* the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness;

He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings,

Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself.

But godliness with contentment is great gain.

For we brought nothing into *this* world, *and it is* certain we can carry nothing out.

And having food and raiment let us be therewith content.

But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and *into* many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.

For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness.

Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses.

I give thee charge in the sight of God, who quickeneth all things, and *before* Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession;

That thou keep *this* commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ:

Which in his times he shall shew, *who is* the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords;

Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom *be* honour and power everlasting. Amen.

Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not

highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy;

That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate;

Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.

I'm certain most of us recognize the god of money as an idol. But I fear many of us fail to recognize the god of self. We must "die to self" so we can live for God.

I trust the following example will humble you as it did me.

"A few years ago, at the Seattle Special Olympics, nine contestants, all physically or mentally disabled, assembled at the starting line for the 100 yard dash.

At the gun, they all started out, not exactly in a dash, but with a relish to run the race to the finish and win. All, that is, except one little boy who stumbled on the asphalt, tumbled over a couple of times and began to cry.

The other eight heard the boy cry. They slowed down and looked back. Then they all turned around and went back.

Every one of them!

One girl with Down's Syndrome bent down and kissed him and said; "This will make it better." Then all nine linked arms and walked together to the finish line.

Everyone in the stadium stood and the cheering went on for several minutes. People who were there are still telling the story. Why? Because deep down we know this one thing: What matters in this life is more than winning for ourselves. What

matters in this life is helping others win, even if it means slowing down and changing our course.”

Matthew 10:39-42

He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.

He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.

He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward.

And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold *water* only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward.

Die to self so as to live for Him!
