

Discerning the Deceivers of the Last Days

In a previous article, we discovered the extent to which the devil is a liar and a deceiver. Jesus declared in John 8:44 (AMP) that there is no truth in him. "When he lies, he speaks what is natural to him, for he is a liar and the father of lies and half-truths."

The same is true of his lesser devils, the demons who try to trick or trap us with their lies of deception.

In His Holy Week discourse on the Mount of Olives, Jesus warned His close disciples that at the "end of the age" there will be specific religious deception, social and political upheavals, natural calamities, disloyalty and persecution (Matt. 24:3-24).

Spiritual Deceptions

In Matthew 24 (NKJV), Jesus repeatedly warned of spiritual deception from that time until the "end of the age," from professing believers, religious leaders and bogus miracle workers:

- "Take heed that no one deceives you" (v. 4).
- "Many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many" (v. 5).
- "Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many" (v. 11).
- "For false christs and prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect" (v. 24).

Such deception in the "last days" requires us to be discerning and *resist* those who may be careless collaborators in these demonic deceptions, or even publicly *reject* those who may be

complicit partners in them. The apostle Paul advised the Roman believers to “note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple” (Rom. 16:17-18, NKJV).

Lifestyle Deceptions

Paul warned the Christian believers in Corinth that they could deceive themselves and even other believers regarding lifestyle decisions. He declared that “the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God” and then gave examples of disqualifying lifestyle practices: “Neither fornicators [sexually active singles], nor idolators, nor adulterers [sexually unfaithful marrieds], nor homosexuals, nor sodomites [male homosexuals], nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor. 6:9-10, NKJV).

Those former lifestyles do not glorify God in our bodies or in our maturing spirits, which are now to be submitted to God (1 Cor. 6:20). Some believers may still struggle with these sinful habits and practices but can be cleansed, set apart for God and totally accepted in His sight by the transforming power of the “Spirit of our God” (1 Cor. 6:11, NKJV).

Paul also spoke to the Galatian Christians about lifestyle deceptions: “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life” (Gal. 6:7-8, NKJV).

The temptation to desire God’s love and forgiveness but still practice the “works of the flesh” (see Galatians 5:19-21) is a devilish deception as well. Paul taught, “Those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.” Instead,

“those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (Gal. 5:24, NKJV).

Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians teaches the putrefying lifestyles of this world are contradictory to the “sweet-smelling aroma” we are to exude, as we are “imitators of God as dear children” (Eph. 5:1-2, NKJV). Such things should not even be named among us “as fitting for saints” (v. 3, NKJV). Those who would deceive us with their “empty words” and human rationalizations about holy living should be avoided, and we should have no fellowship with them (vv. 6-7, 11, NKJV).

Doctrinal Deceivers

The small Epistles of St. John are exhortations to allow the life of the Holy Spirit to bring our faith’s works fully alive in us. It is understandable that Satan would work against us as we seek to “walk according to [Christ’s] commandments” (2 John 6, NKJV).

In this progressively holy lifestyle, we are to beware of the “many deceivers” who have gone out into the world, “who do not confess Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh.” Bluntly, John said, “This is a deceiver and an antichrist” (2 John 7, NKJV).

Seductive teachings of independent, doctrinal deceivers threaten the stability of the church. Jesus is not “a son of God” but “the Son of God.” He is the “only begotten Son” of the Father, who was incarnated in the flesh to live a sinless life and to suffer and die as our sin-substitute. Anyone who would teach other than that is “an antichrist” who subverts the Word of God for the Antichrist, who is to come (1 John 2:18).

John is speaking of the doctrinal heretics who withdrew from the organized fellowship of believers and the spiritual oversight of their appointed leaders (1 John 2:18-19). Their withdrawal is evidence that they never really shared in the life and fellowship of the church of Christ as true believers.

“He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son” (1 John 2:22, NKJV). Such doctrinal deceivers have invaded believing congregations since the early church (2 John 2:18-27). So, watch out for such persons and learn to “test the spirits, whether they are of God” (1 John 4:1, NKJV) and do not share “in [their] evil deeds” (2 John 11, NKJV).

The Minister of Truth

Rather than a dystopian government’s “ministry of truth,” Jesus Christ is *the* Minister of Truth. He said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6, NKJV).

Let us not be deceived by misinformation, disinformation or mal-information but give ourselves completely to the Truth, Jesus Christ, who said, “I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work” (Rev. 22:12, NKJV). {eoa}

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Personal Reasons Why Christians Support Israel

Editor's Note: This is the first of a five-part series.

Since the founding of Israel almost 75 years ago, millions of Christians have visited Israel and its holy sites. Many of them have experienced their Bibles coming alive and their faith renewed.

It only stands to reason they would return home with excitement and a newfound appreciation for the country that afforded them that experience.

This was certainly my story. I was a 19-year-old biblical studies major in university when I had the opportunity to study in Israel for the summer. The Bible I read on a devotional level every day and studied in class at a theological level became three-dimensional in its historical, geographical and cultural setting. It came alive!

A trip to Israel can truly be transformational. I have never been the same, and ever since, I have been an ardent supporter of Israel for affording me this wonderful opportunity.

Israel Welcomes Christian Tours

Access to Christian Sites

Christian tours also benefit from the freedom Israel provides to access Christian holy sites. This would not be the case if it were a closed country like many Muslim or communist countries, where we would not have access to sites so central to our Bible and faith.

We should be thankful for the freedom we have to visit religious sites and even to hold prayer and worship services while there.

Care of Sites and Artifacts

The Muslim authorities over the Temple Mount did not want to preserve any artifact that proved a Jewish or Christian connection to the site, so they had no problem destroying and disposing of them. As a result, two archaeologists started the Temple Mount Sifting Project, and over 200,000 volunteers and tourists have helped sift through the debris. They have found over 400,000 artifacts dating back to the Stone Age. About 15% of the pottery finds come from the First Temple period and over 40% from the Second Temple period.

Israel would never have done what the Muslim authorities did. They would have conducted a proper excavation and cataloged remains before any such construction project could begin. Christians should appreciate Israel's preservation of artifacts, so many of which prove the accuracy of the Bible and are meaningful to our faith.

Safety of Israeli Christians

Another reason for Christian support of Israel has nothing to do with tourism: the well-being of the Christian minority in Israel. While religious minorities face intense persecution across the Middle East, Israel provides the only haven for Christians in the region. While Christianity is becoming extinct in much of the region, it is growing in Israel. We should support Israel for the safety of the Christian minority and the opportunities they have as full citizens of the Jewish state.

Israel is a blessing to Christians around the world, and we owe the people of Israel a great debt of gratitude. {eoa}

Dr. Susan Michael is USA Director of the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem and host of the Out of Zion podcast. Subscribe today to listen to her Israel Answers series on the Out of Zion podcast. Visit Israel with ICEJ Tours.

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Business Leader: The Stage Is Set for Your Story

Recently my husband and I attended a leadership retreat with some new friends. We went to rest and regroup.

We made a major move in 2020, and according to a survey by University Hospitals, moving – even a good move – is in the top three of life's stressors.

We have all had so much change, so many hurdles rise up since 2020.

I was planning to rest and reflect on ideas for my new book while on our much-needed retreat in Branson, Missouri. We settled into the lodge, on the scenic edge of the Ozark Mountains. While I was looking forward to the downtime, my husband, who is the social energizer bunny, had already made several new friends at the breakfast table. He looked up toward the coffee bar where he knew I'd be and quipped excitedly, "Hey, baby, I have set the stage for you to share your story with our new friends."

God is doing this for you right now: setting the stage for you to share your story.

I took a deep breath and thought, "How could I not?"

With my fresh coffee in hand, I joined the table to tell the

story of how God saved me years ago from a fiery explosion that almost killed me. I knew exactly what would happen next.

Every time I tell of the miracles of healing, learning to walk, and coming through the fire with a heart On Fire for Jesus, the tears flow, mouths drop open and the nods begin as listeners receive healing for their own injuries, whether they were burned by betrayal, bankruptcy, disappointment, divorce, rejection or some other painful experience.

Are you ready to share your story? I promise you that someone needs to hear it.

One of my great pleasures is spreading the wildfire and passion of God's unending love for and personal interest in your life and your story. I'm relentlessly telling my story, and it's your turn to tell yours.

Get started with these three tips so you can share your story on the stages God sets up for you:

- Value your story enough to write it out.
- List the gold nuggets of how and where God has helped you.
- Tell your story when God opens the door.

God has set the stage for you to tell your story, my friend. Get ready! {eos}

Linda Fields, American business leader, speaker and author teaches a unique approach to personal leadership and professional success. Surviving a life-threatening fire as a teenager set her on a course to help others overcome their own trials to live life ON FIRE with passion and purpose. Spearheading a successful corporate training center affecting over 150,000 participants and university business teaching quickly launched Linda into her God-given mission to affect many with life-changing truth and business solutions. Linda founded 7M-Pact, a marketplace organization to deliver

training, coaching and events based on the teachings of Jesus to help clients grow businesses and develop their vision and leadership to serve their clients by living ON FIRE. As a speaker and executive coach, Linda loves to ignite a spark of passion and purpose in the hearts of leaders, their teams and organizations to see it spread like wildfire. With over 100,000 downloads of Linda's weekly podcast, On Fire with Linda Fields, men and women are succeeding God's way to influence a world in need. Her books and writings to equip individuals to live ON FIRE and transform the world are found at and include Prayer Plan Your Life, Find Your Why Forward and Impact Your Sphere of Influence. Tune in to her podcast on the Charisma Podcast Network.

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Messianic Rabbi: The Difference Between Holiness and Righteousness

A few years ago, I was invited to go fishing with one of my friends. As we drove together to the lake, my friend told me his wife had bought him a new lure the day before. He held up the package and as he did he said with a smile, "Isn't it pretty?"

Now, he was not saying those words in the "Isn't it pretty" of a sportsman looking at a new fishing pole, rifle or boat. He was saying it because it was one of the most fru fru fishing

lures he had ever seen.

As the day went on, we fished all over the lake while having a great conversation (something fishermen say takes place when they are not catching any fish). As we watched the sun cross mid-afternoon on its route to setting, we decided we'd had enough conversation and started heading toward the boat ramp. As we slowly motored on our way, I watched as my friend exchanged the bait we had been using all day for the lure his wife had purchased for him. When I asked him about this, he said, "She's gonna ask if I used it. She bought it for me; I've got to at least honor her by using it once."

So we stopped the boat as he cast the new lure out into the water. Within seconds, for the first time all day, he got a hit on his line. After a short fight, he pulled a beautiful bass out of the water. I then spent the next hour watching him cast that lure into the water over and over, catching one bass after another.

On the way home, our conversation was mostly about the amount of fish he caught on that fru fru lure and how much more we might have caught that day if he had tied that lure on his line from the outset of the day.

You may be wondering what this fish story has to do with the difference between holiness and righteousness.

Many of us live our lives trying to be righteous, like my friend that day. He knew it was the righteous thing to do to use the lure his wife bought for him, but he only did it because he knew it was the righteous thing to do, whereas holiness is simply doing what G-D would have done in the same situation.

Let me explain further. If somehow my friend's wife had watched as we fished all day just waiting for her husband to use the special lure she had bought for him, only to watch him tie it to his line while saying "She's gonna ask," would she

have considered his actions righteous, loving, honoring? No, she would not. But imagine how she would have felt had she been able to watch him arrive at the lake and share excitedly about the lure his wife had bought for him and then watched him tie the lure onto his line before the very first cast.

In other words, his actions should have been motivated by his love for his wife and not because “she was gonna ask.” That is the difference between holiness and righteousness. Holiness isn’t doing the right thing because it is righteous. Holiness is being so affected by love that you don’t even consider doing the wrong things. G-D commanded His people to be holy as He is holy in Leviticus 19:1-2 (TLV):

“*ADONAI* spoke to Moses saying: ‘Speak to all the congregation of *Bnei-Yisrael* and tell them: You shall be *kedoshim*, for I, *ADONAI* your God, am holy.’”

Many people believe that this is an impossible task for humans to achieve. However, it really isn’t impossible at all. But it does require our truly allowing G-D to provide a new heart and new spirit, as we read in Ezekiel 36:26 (TLV):

“Moreover I will give you a new heart. I will put a new spirit within you. I will remove the stony heart from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.”

With this new heart comes the kind of love for G-D that results in holiness. It is this holiness that makes it possible for us to obey the commandments to love G-D and love our neighbors. Holiness goes beyond a desire to be seen as righteous. This is what Yeshua was teaching about in Matthew 23:2-3 (TLV) when He spoke of the Torah scholars and Pharisees, saying:

“The *Torah* scholars and Pharisees sit on the seat of Moses. So whatever they tell you, do and observe. But don’t do what they do; for what they say, they do not do.”

Notice that Yeshua didn't speak against what they were teaching; He only spoke against what they were doing. Going further, He didn't speak against what they were doing because what they were doing was wrong. No, Yeshua spoke against what they were doing because of their motivation. Yeshua's words were, "All their works they do to be noticed by men" (Matt. 23:5, TLV).

You see, we can do righteous works without being holy. But if you are holy, you will do righteous works. {eoa}

Eric Tokajer *is the author of* *Overcoming Fearlessness, What If Everything You Were Taught About the Ten Commandments Was Wrong?, With Me in Paradise, Transient Singularity, OY! How Did I Get Here?: Thirty-One Things I Wish Someone Had Told Me Before Entering Ministry, #ManWisdom: With Eric Tokajer, Jesus Is to Christianity as Pasta Is to Italians and Galatians in Context.*

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Kingdom Economics: The Lord's Provision Doesn't Depend on the State of the Economy

The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) released the April employment report and the March JOLTS report (job openings and labor turnover survey). The unemployment rate was unchanged at

3.6%, total payrolls were constant at 406K, and private payrolls fell 18K. The participation rate fell to 62.2% as workers left the workforce.

The JOLTS report showed a record high million quits and million job openings. Employee wages are falling behind inflation, and workers are quitting their current jobs in search of higher pay with labor shortage assurances that they will be able to find another job. The labor churn is increasing inflation and inflationary expectations, as well as straining small businesses particularly.

The biggest economic news of the past week was the Federal Reserve's (Fed's) announcement of an expected 0.5% increase in the federal funds rate. The increase moves the federal funds rate to % and the prime interest rate to 4.0%. The 0.5% increases were expected to continue for three months. Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell also announced the reduction of their balance sheet by nearly \$50 billion for the next three months and then increasing it to nearly \$100 billion per month for months following.

The markets viewed the Fed announcement as dovish. After the announcement, the Dow Jones Industrial Average, S&P 500 and NASDAQ averages all jumped close to 3%, gold and commodities increased, and the interest rates on U.S. bonds increased. But overnight, after the markets digested what uncontrolled inflation would mean for business, labor and the economy, the stock markets fell sharply for the balance of the week.

We may get a reprieve in inflation for the next three months or so, but not because of the Fed's announced plans. Last year's inflation, as measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI), was relatively low for January, February and March. The next CPI estimate will be compared to a significantly higher inflation number from a year ago, which makes inflation for this year appear lower.

In my opinion, the Fed's current announced policies are insufficient to control inflation. Eventually the Fed will be forced to control inflation. But the longer that inflation is uncontrolled, the more difficult and costly it will be to control. Inflationary expectations are a major source of inflation, and they usually come down slowly. Until the Fed matches strong words with strong actions, prices will go up, up and away.

Chairman Powell also indicated that recession was not on the horizon. I sincerely hope he is correct. But many analysts, I concluded, believe that it will be impossible to control inflation without a recession. The Fed is too far behind and is doing too little. We are already seeing a wage-price spiral.

Larry Summers, who served as Treasury Secretary under President Clinton and director of the National Economic Council under President Obama, said, "If you look at history, there has never been a moment when inflation was above 4% and unemployment was below 5% when we did not have a recession within the next two years." Both of those conditions have long been met.

Citizens of the kingdom of God are different from people of the world. We are in the world but not of the world. We are citizens of the United States or our respective countries, but our true citizenship is in heaven, seated in heavenly places.

Citizens in the world depend on the strength of their respective economies, the prosperity of their businesses and the size of their incomes. But in contrast, our futures depend upon our relationship with our King and our faith.

Since we are currently living in the world, we will sometimes face the challenges of debt, unemployment, health concerns, relationship issues, accidents and discouragement. But the Lord told us that if we have just a little faith, we can move

mountains, which would include the mountains of adversity. In fact, He said that nothing will be impossible for us.

“If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you” (Matt. 17:20, NASB).

The Bible contains many examples of God working supernaturally to change economic circumstances. In 2 Kings 4:1-7 we read about a widow who was in debt and in danger of losing her children. But the word of the Lord, through Elisha, told her to borrow many jars and fill them with her single jar of oil. God multiplied the oil. Elisha told the woman to sell the oil, pay her debts and live on the rest.

“So she came and told the man of God. And he said, ‘Go, sell the oil and pay your debt, and you and your sons can live on the rest’” (2 Kings 4:7, NASB).

In Genesis 26:1-13, in the middle of a famine the Lord told Isaac to not go to Egypt but to stay in the land where God told him, saying He would be with him and bless him. I suspect that Isaac’s mind was telling him to move to where there was food, but instead he was obedient to the Lord. The Lord was faithful, and Isaac’s obedience resulted in him becoming wealthy.

“Now Isaac sowed in that land and reaped in the same year a hundred times as much. And the LORD blessed him, and the man became rich, and continued to grow richer until he became very wealthy” (Gen. 26:12-13, NASB).

The Lord’s provision for His children does not depend on the state of the economy, geopolitical events, your job or anything else. He simply asks us to seek His kingdom and righteousness first. Provision is promised. He is always faithful. For the kingdom citizen, the future can always be up, up and away.

“But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be provided to you. So do not worry about tomorrow” (Matt. 6:33-34a, NASB).

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Ukrainian Courage Comes From 30 Years of Preaching the Gospel, Ukrainian Pastor Says

Pastor Zhenya Kasevich calls Ukraine “the Bible Belt for Soviet countries.”

Beginning in 1990, according to Kasevich, hundreds of Christian ministries started pouring resources into Ukraine. Pastors preached the gospel on Sunday morning. Bibles were readily available to anybody who wanted one, and lots of Christian programming like CBN broadcast the gospel on TV.

Because of the Christian influence over the last 30 years, Ukraine not only became the area Bible Belt, but it also sent more missionaries and pastors to Russia than any other European country.

When Russia invaded Ukraine in March, much of the West thought

Ukraine would be crushed in weeks. But Ukraine has resisted, and at the time of my interview with Kasevich, the war had lasted 70 days. Many news outlets are reporting that over 20,000 Russian soldiers have been killed.

“We are not just fighting,” Kasevich says. “We are pushing them back. Nobody was expecting such a resistance from the Ukrainians, and not just from the army, but from the people. You can see people are standing against tanks without any weapons.”

When people ask, “Where is all of this courage coming from?” Kasevich has an answer.

“This courage is coming from preaching the gospel to those people for the last 30 years,” he says. “Resistance and courage and faith of those Ukrainians came from the Bible.”

As Russia has successfully invaded parts of Ukraine, we’ve received many credible reports that their soldiers have closed churches and captured, imprisoned and even killed pastors. Their focus on shutting down churches and shutting up pastors seems to confirm the importance of the Bible’s message to Ukraine’s resistance.

Churches have not only fueled the fight against Russian tyranny, but they’ve also led a historic evacuation effort for women, children and the elderly. Kasevich says 5.5 million people have escaped war zones in Ukraine. As they’ve escaped, they’ve been aided at every turn by local churches and Christian nonprofits.

Christian churches and organizations have transported thousands of tons of food into Ukraine, and on their way back, they evacuate those who want to leave the country.

The effort by Christian organizations has been so massive that some Christian leaders have compared the evacuation to Dunkirk, when thousands of private British boats were sent to

save the British military from Hitler's advancing army.

Because Kasevich now lives in Naples, Florida, he joined the effort by raising and sending money through Zelle and Venmo for essential needs for women and children like gas for vehicles to get out of Ukraine, food and diapers.

At first the immediate need was focused around safety and evacuation. Now, the need is centered around rebuilding lives and sustaining the 5.5 million people who have escaped war zones.

"When they are coming back to Kiev, they lost their jobs," Kasevich says. "They don't have any money. They don't have any support. They don't have anything for their children like Pampers or dietary food or anything."

Kasevich helps with this by working with 30 local churches in the region. As he raises the money, he sends each of them \$1,000-\$2,000. "A thousand dollars is a lot of money for Ukrainian people," he says. "It can go a long way."

He also says that 100% of the money he receives goes to churches who help with direct needs of specific Ukrainian families. Chase Bank, which he works with, has agreed to waive all of the international transfer fees.

Kasevich explains, "If I get money today, tomorrow morning, it will be on their Ukrainian bank account."

We have vetted Kasevich, and 100% of the money you give will go directly to a local Ukrainian church, who will then distribute it to individual Ukrainian families who need it. Please give by clicking on this link.

Kasevich concluded our interview by saying something that shows just how much the gospel has influenced him personally. "Maybe I can say something which is not very popular," he says. "We need to pray for Russian Christians as well, and to

pray that God is going to touch them and turn their hearts towards Him in a miraculous way.”

For more of my interview with Pastor Zhenya Kasevich, please click [here](#) or listen to my *Strang Report* with him on the Charisma Podcast Network.

And, to help Christians in Ukraine who have been devastated by the horrors of this war, please visit the website of Charisma’s ministry partner, Christian Life Missions. You can be assured that 100% of every donation goes directly to the designated cause and all donations are tax deductible. {eoa}

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10 Things Many Institutional Churches Miss

The following are my general observations to aid the church in its quest to restore New Testament patterns. (The quest for first-century apostolicity is sometimes referred to as *primitivism* or *the restoration movement*.)

I realize that the following are broad categories based on my opinion that may or may not precisely fit with each church or denomination.

1. The early church leaders did not matriculate through a formal ordination process. In the Old Testament, there is a formal ceremony depicting the placement of the priesthood (Exod. 28-29). In the New Testament, we see that the original

twelve were commissioned by Jesus to serve as His apostles. A formal ceremony commissioning them is not indicated (Mark 3:13-15; Luke 6:12-13). I would assume that Jesus laid His hands upon them after they functioned for a time in their calling while walking with Him and receiving His correction and mentoring (Luke 10:17-20). We also see the elders of the church of Antioch laying their hands upon Paul and Barnabas, setting them apart for the work of apostolic ministry (Acts 13:1-2). The Pauline pattern of establishing churches also involved the laying on of hands, setting people apart for ministry (Acts 14:22-25; 1 Tim. 4:14).

In all these instances, the most important aspect of their ordination involved walking with a spiritual leader in the context of a Jesus-centered community. This organically culminated in their commissioning after they proved their calling both in practice and by a witness of the Spirit (Acts 20:28). Consequently, the current practice of matriculating clergy (through an extra local seminary, followed by an elaborate ceremony) as the prerequisite to serving as a church overseer is not the norm of early primitivism.

2. There was no separation between clergy and laity. In the first-century church, all Christ followers participated in the priesthood (1 Pet. 2:8-9). There was no separation between the church place and workplace or the so-called clergy and laity. Also, most overseers were married and were vetted based upon their ability to manage their biological household (1 Tim. 3:1-12). As a spiritual leader, Paul was bivocational and even used a lecture hall to launch a church (Acts 18:3; 19:9).

3. The Spirit was poured out upon all flesh for ministry. On the day of Pentecost, Peter equated the Jesus movement with Joel's prophecy of the last days when the Spirit would be poured out upon all flesh to release all people – male, female, young and old – to prophesy and experience visions and dreams (Acts 2:17-18). Hence, the focus was on the spontaneous empowerment by the Spirit to advance gospel proliferation

(Acts 1:8-9). Today, church services are entrenched in predictable liturgy and routines that exclude all from ministry except ordained clergy. They should instead release Spirit-inspired ministry irrespective of formal training, gender or age.

4. Each successive generation of church movement should be apostolic. For the church to remain an ever-expanding missional movement, apostolically gifted leaders should serve at the helm of denominations and networks. This is the reason why Jesus chose 12 apostles and not 12 pastors to initiate His movement. Historically, many movements appoint gifted administrators as their leaders in their second generation. This bottlenecks expansion, which then results in routinization.

5. All people were to read and interpret the Scriptures. In the New Testament, the apostolic writers wrote letters to their congregations and church collectives, not just to other apostles and elders (1 Cor. 1:1-2). Hence, they expected all believers to understand and interpret the sacred writings with the help of the Spirit and church teachings (Heb. 5:11-14; 1 John 2:20-27). Unfortunately, some historic denominations (like Roman Catholicism) discouraged the so-called laity from reading the Bible to prevent church schisms. Even some historic protestant Christians and Evangelicals often depend solely upon their pastors to study and expound the Scriptures, as if they are excluded from devotion to the Scriptures because they are not full-time ministers. This goes against the plain teachings of Scripture (Ps. 1; 1 Tim. 3:15-16).

6. We are to confess our sins to one another. Some historic churches only allow confession of sins to one's assigned priest. The New Testament encourages all believers to confess their sins to one another so they can be healed (Jas. 5:16).

7. Christianity is a way of life, not a routine. Jesus said that He was the Way (John 14:6). The early church was

initially described as a way of life (Acts 5:20; 9:2; 19:23). Unfortunately, many Christians view Christianity as a religion defined merely by church attendance on Sundays and special holidays. Sadly, it has become a routine that is often not integrated into their daily life.

8. Christianity is not defined and confined to a building. The original church was persecuted and often forced to meet secretly in homes and catacombs. Now Christianity is so marginalized in a culture that people call buildings that hold Christian services “churches.” Hence, the faith has been relegated to a one-hour service in a building on Sundays.

9. The office of bishop should encompass apostolicity. Today, many historic churches believe that the office of the bishop is the successor of the original apostles. Despite this, many churches pick bishops who are great administrators but who often lack the missional zeal and ability that’s befitting to apostolic ministry. This limits the level of equipping grace believers need for evangelistic zeal and ministry capacity (Eph. 4:7-12).

10. God has no grandchildren. In the New Testament, every person had to be born from above and personally receive Jesus to be a true Christian (John 1:12-13; 3:3-8). Often in institutional churches a person is born in a Christian family, baptized as an infant and grows up as a cultural Christian without personally encountering Jesus. Unfortunately for them, God has no grandchildren. He demands that every individual become His son or daughter (Rom. 8:14-16). {eoa}

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How You Should Pray for People in Authority

We all know that Scripture tells us to pray for those in authority. To those who possess the fear of the Lord, that is not to be taken lightly, even if we understand nothing else.

But *why* should we pray? *Who* exactly is our authority? And *what* should we pray?

Why Pray for Those in Authority?

Prayers for people who are in positions of authority have high priority in the heart of God.

We see this in scriptures such as 1 Timothy 2:1-4: “I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (NASB1995).

The prayers that Christians pray for those in authority

matter; they are essential to the advancement of the kingdom. We cannot afford to leave them up to others.

Prayer for leaders must become one of the features of our lives as intercessors.

Why should we pray for those who are in authority? According to 1 Timothy 2:1-4, there are two reasons:

- So that “we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity.”
- So that God can bring those in authority – as well as those under their authority – to Himself (He “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth”).

As the late Bible teacher Derek Prince has said, it doesn't matter what plans, systems or programs you devise; if you bypass prayer, you will not have the power to carry them out.

Prince compared prayerless intentions to a building that is wired for electricity – if it is not connected to a power source, nothing will work, even if the wires are in good order and the light fixtures are beautiful.

Our power source is prayer. The Bible commands us to pray in particular for “kings and all who are in authority,” for good government and wise leadership.

Why?

- So that we might have peace and order
- For the propagation of the gospel
- Because God desires all men to be saved

Who Should You Pray For?

Don't limit your thinking only to governmental leaders when you talk about praying for people who are in authority.

Of course, you should include the individuals who make most of the key governmental decisions in your nation's government.

In the United States this would include the following:

- President and vice-president
- The nine justices of the Supreme Court
- Senators and congressmen at the national and state levels
- The governor of your state
- Local mayors, aldermen, etc.

You can apply these same principles to your prayer for spiritual leaders on all levels – from your local pastor and church staff members to regional leaders, national leaders and anyone who oversees an aspect of spiritual life in the church.

And you can also pray for marketplace leaders, for the “elders” who “sit at the gates” of your city, for those who drive the commerce where you live.

When you pray for those in authority, you are selecting – by name, if possible – people who oversee certain spheres and assignments.

What Should You Pray For?

We learn from many scriptures that God exalts rulers and people in authority if they exercise their authority with righteousness.

So, one of the first things we should pray for is that the authority figure will become righteous and will express righteousness, wisdom and justice in all that he or she does.

The Book of Proverbs expresses it best: “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people” (Prov. 14:34, NASB) and “If a king judges the poor with truth, his throne will be established forever” (Prov. 29:14, NASB).

Dr. Charles Stanley has suggested 10 ways to pray for the men and women who occupy the highest offices in your land:

1. Pray that they would realize their personal sinfulness and their daily need for cleansing of their sin by Jesus Christ.
2. Pray that they would recognize their personal inadequacy to fulfill their tasks and that they would depend upon God for knowledge, wisdom and the courage to do what is right.
3. Pray that they would reject all counsel that violates spiritual principles, trusting God to prove them right.
4. Pray that they would resist those who would pressure them to violate their consciences.
5. Pray that they would reverse the trends of socialism and humanism in their nation, both of which deify man rather than God.
6. Pray that they would be ready to sacrifice their personal ambitions and political careers for the sake of their nation, if yielding them would be in the best interest of their country.
7. Pray that they would rely upon prayer and the Word of God as the source of their daily strength, wisdom and courage.
8. Pray that they would restore dignity, honor, trustworthiness and righteousness to the office they hold.
9. Pray that they would remember to be good examples in their conduct to the fathers, mothers, sons and daughters of this nation.
10. Pray that they would be reminded daily that they are accountable to Almighty God for the decisions they make.

Today and every day, I invite you to join me in fulfilling God's command in Scripture to pray for those in authority.
{eoa}

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The Darkness Is Already Here, but It's Hard to See

It's easy for me to imagine not bowing to the Antichrist. It's easy for me to picture myself standing up against the mark of the beast no matter the cost. But when I look at my life, I wonder if I value convenience more than I value righteousness.

Within the last two years, my wife and I subscribed to Disney+. And even though Disney has openly claimed to push LGBT content in their shows, I've remained a subscriber to the service. Even though they oppose commonsense laws about not letting teachers indoctrinate elementary-age kids with sexual ideology, I've remained a subscriber. And here's the reason: I

want to watch all of the Marvel superhero movies before I cancel my subscription.

Too often, I value convenience over doing the right thing. Another good example is how a few years ago I realized Facebook and Instagram were increasing my anxiety, shortening my attention span and making me feel relationally shallow. At the time, I told my wife that I was starting to feel “socially schizophrenic.” I coined the phrase and described it as having lots of knowledge but very little relationship.

I knew random details about friends from eighth grade, but I wasn't getting to know the people around me. I learned lots of random tidbits about science and history, but I hadn't done a deep study on one book. I learned how to fix things from YouTube, but I was never taught anything by a more experienced peer or mentor. In short, I was floating through the world with a lot of knowledge with no relationship attached to it.

But here's the kicker. I kept living like that for at least a year. I wanted all of that quick knowledge because it was convenient. Like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, I wanted unlimited knowledge with no meaningful relationship.

After the Lord confronted me for six months with His Word, His whisper, signs and confirmations, I finally gave up Facebook and Instagram, but I held on to my love for convenience.

When I watched this Lion of Judah video, I realized why. In the video, the deep voice with an English accent goes through John 3:18-21. When he gets to verse 19, he reads, “The light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (NKJV). That verse hit me hard.

In some areas of my life, I'm prone to love darkness. Sometimes I love convenience more than I love doing the right thing, and if I'm honest with myself, I can see that sometimes I love darkness more than I love righteousness.

I love the darkness because it's more convenient. It's more convenient to stay hidden instead of seeking out relationship. It's more convenient to stick to building a following for myself on social media rather than building genuine relationships with my neighbors. And it's more convenient to stay subscribed to Disney+ than to not have access to my favorite movies.

As I'm writing this, I realize I need to take my eyes off the apocalyptic future and imagined epic moments of standing for truth. Instead, I need to ask Jesus to give me a love for His light now.

If I love His light and seek to serve Him in small ways, like giving up social media or Disney+ now, He'll equip me to stand against a dictator or refuse to take the mark, no matter how inconvenient or painful it is.

Watch this video from Lion of Judah: {eoa}

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The Only Way to Make Everything All Right

We all have a deep need to feel all right. And we can spend a lot of time and energy trying to do things that make us feel like we're OK – OK with ourselves, with others and even God.

But we don't need to wear ourselves out trying to be right with God through our own effort. The truth is we can't make our lives right on our own, but we *can* receive the righteousness of God by putting our faith in Christ.

Romans 3:20 (NIV) says, "Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin." That means the reason God established the law was to show us how much we need a Savior who can make us righteous before Him.

Self-righteousness is believing we are made right with God through our own works. For example, a person might think, "Well, if I read through my Bible every year, then God will be pleased with me." But the truth is we read the Bible because it helps us in our everyday life, not because it makes us right with God. In the same way, my preaching doesn't make me a righteous person. The only way we are made righteous (right with God) is by having faith in Jesus Christ – it's not something we can ever earn in our own effort.

I used to really struggle with self-righteousness. I remember years ago when the pastor at the church I was attending encouraged us to read through the Bible in a year. Every Sunday he'd ask, "Who's been doing your Bible reading?" Well, I didn't want to be the one not standing up, so I got really serious about it.

We each got a calendar so we could check off the days we read the chapters. As long as I had all my check marks, I liked that calendar. But then I got 36 chapters behind and had these big, gaping holes! It was like a nightmare for me.

So one day I decided I was going to catch up, and I zipped right through the chapters. And honestly, when I closed my Bible I felt relieved. But then I heard the Holy Spirit speak to my heart, saying, "So, what did you learn?" And I realized I could not remember *one* thing!

God taught me an important lesson that day. He would rather we read one verse and actually get something out of it and connect with Him than read 36 chapters and learn nothing.

The point is we need to have the right motives for the things we do and stop making laws out of tasks that make us feel better about ourselves but are unfruitful.

In 2 Corinthians 5:21 (NIV), Paul writes, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." Every day of my life I say, "I am the righteousness of God in Christ." Now, I'm not righteous because I do everything right – no one is perfect, and none of us does everything right. The Bible says in 1 John 1:8 (NIV), "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us."

Now, it's important that we try to do what is right, but God wants us to live through faith in Christ. Then, as we have a personal relationship with Him, He puts the desire in us to do what's right and we can do it by His grace because we *want* to do it.

In Philippians 3:3 (AMP), Paul explains that we "take pride and exult in Christ Jesus and place no confidence [in what we have or who we are] in the flesh." He says he obeyed the law without fault, and if any person had a reason to have confidence in himself by the law's standard, he had more of a reason than anyone.

In verses 7 through 9 (NIV) of that chapter, Paul goes on to say, "But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ – the righteousness that

comes from God on the basis of faith.”

Paul is saying that in order to have a relationship with Christ, he had to be willing to gather up all of his accomplishments and the things he had worked so hard for and get rid of them. That’s because it’s nothing but trash compared to the priceless privilege of knowing Christ as our Lord and Savior.

I want to be clear and say that what we do matters, but our good works do not make us acceptable to God. We are only made right with Him by putting our faith in Jesus Christ. That’s when we can rest in knowing that everything is all right.
{eoa}

Joyce Meyer is a New York Times bestselling author and founder of Joyce Meyer Ministries, Inc. She has authored more than 135 books, including *Battlefield of the Mind* and *The Power of Thank You (FaithWords)*. She hosts the *Enjoying Everyday Life* radio and TV programs, which air on hundreds of stations worldwide. For more information, visit [. Please note: The views and opinions expressed throughout this publication and/or website are those of the respective authors and do not necessarily reflect those of Joyce Meyer Ministries.](#)

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