

# 10 Common Traits of a Jesus-Driven Church

The Word of God teaches us in Romans 8:29 that believers were “predestined to be conformed to the image of [Jesus Christ].” The apostle Paul wrote this to the church in Rome; therefore, the subject of this verse was written to the corporate body of Christ. From this passage, we learn that local congregations are called to become Christlike in their methodology, mission and essence.

Although numerous attributes can be unpacked, in this article, I am narrowing the focus to 10 traits every Jesus-driven church must have. Of course, Jesus Christ was the only one perfect human being who ever lived, which means that every other person or community will fall far short of His glory, no matter how hard they try. The best we can ever do is to attempt to walk in His grace in our journey, understanding that we will never find a perfect church or entity on this side of heaven.

That being said, the following are 10 traits every Jesus-driven church must attempt to walk in:

**1. There is a spirit of joyful service.** Jesus taught that the greatest in the kingdom is the one who serves (Matt. 23:11). He modeled this when He knelt and washed the feet of His disciples (John 13). This was totally against the Roman/Greco ethos of His day, which taught that humbling oneself before others who were not your superior was inappropriate and unacceptable. Consequently, the Jesus-driven church must celebrate voluntary service for the good of others.

**2. There is an expectation of the miraculous.** When the apostle Peter was preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, He described Jesus as the one who “went about doing good and healing all

who were oppressed of the devil, for God was with Him" (Acts 10:38b). Thus, Jesus was equated with the miraculous power of God. Jesus even told His followers that He expected them to do more wondrous works than He did (John 14:12). Consequently, the Jesus-driven church will have within its culture a corporate faith that expects the miraculous.

**3. There is a sense of divine mission and purpose.** When Jesus preached His first sermon, He read from the prophet Isaiah the passage that prophesied His mission (Luke 4:18, Isa. 61:1-2). He was a man on a mission who had objectives and goals from day to day (Luke 13:32). He told Pilate that his life's purpose was to testify to the truth as the King (John 18:37). In light of all this, the Jesus-driven church will have a compelling vision to ignite a sense of purpose and mission among their congregations.

**4. There is ample discipleship.** As we read the four gospels, it is evident that Jesus' primary ministry focus was to first pour into His 12 disciples and, secondly, to pour into His 70 disciples (Luke 9:1, Luke 10:1). Local churches that are conformed to the image of Christ will base their whole ministry on making disciples rather than merely attracting crowds.

**5. There are genuine fellowship and community.** Jesus did not merely teach His disciples. He lived among them and did life with them. He shared His pain with them, ate with them and prayed with them (Luke 14:14-46). The Jesus-driven church will have, as a core value, the practice of genuine fellowship and community.

**6. There is a focus on the Father.** Jesus was always in the bosom of the Father and was described from the beginning as being with God (John 1:1-18). Verses such as these reveal how intimate Jesus was with His Father. He also said that He and His Father were one (John 10:30) and that He only speaks what His Father gives Him and always does what pleases His Father

(John 8:28-29). Consequently, the Jesus-driven church will walk in a spirit of adoption as sons of the living God who cry out from the abundance of their heart "Abba, Father" (Romans 8:15). This kind of church runs counter to the orphan spirit in the world, thus ministering healing to the brokenhearted and disenfranchised of society.

**7. The Spirit of prayer is a priority.** Jesus regularly practiced rising before dawn to pray (Mark 1:35). His disciples, realizing that the secret of His power was prayer, asked Him to teach them to pray (Luke 11:1). Hebrews 5:7 describes the days of His humanity as a time when He offered up prayers with loud cries and tears. Since Jesus was a man of regular, fervent prayer, the Jesus-driven church will also be a community of much fervent prayer.

**8. Patience and perseverance are necessary attributes.** The Bible tells us that Jesus, with patience, "endured the cross" because of "the joy that was set before Him" (Heb. 12:2). Even though He was born God, the Son, He did not minister or do any miracles during the first 30 years of His life. This took great patience (Luke 3:23). Any church that conforms to Christ Jesus will be a church with a strong ethic of patience amid tests and suffering.

**9. They adopt a way of life rather than a religion.** Jesus said, "I am the way" (John 14:6). He did not say, "I am the religion."

The early Church described its journey in Christ as a life and a way (Acts 5:20, Acts 24:14). Churches that are legalistic, ritualistic and religious (attempting to follow Christ based merely on rules and regulations) are not mimicking Christ but rather manmade religion (Gal. 3:1-3, Col. 2:16-23). The Jesus-driven church will express a relationship with God in an organic, relational way.

**10. They speak truth to power.** Many contemporary pastors and

leaders' goal is to avoid cultural conflict to become "relevant." However, the Lord that such pastors claim to follow always spoke truth to power. A cursory reading of Scripture demonstrates how He purposely healed people on the Sabbath, an affront to religious leaders (Mark 3:1-5, John 5). He spoke about His kingdom to a Roman leader named Pontus Pilate (John 18:36-38), and He rebuked religious leaders for putting their traditions ahead of the Word of God (Mark 7:1-23). The Jesus-driven church will never water down the truth but will adequately reflect the whole counsel of God in their values, words and mission.

In conclusion, we can say many other things in regard to being conformed to the image of Christ; however, if we attempt to walk in the 10 points above, we will leave a powerful imprint on the world around us. {eoa}

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# Prophecy: A Season of Unprecedented Opportunities

There are divine opportunities all around us. Sometimes, we just don't see them. But in this season, God is going to make it plain to those who have a heart to follow His generous Spirit.

I heard the Lord say:

"This is a season of unprecedented opportunities—a season of opportunities that eye has not seen and ear has not heard, nor has entered into the heart of man. I love you, and I will cause you to prosper in the midst of a whirlwind. I will cause you to rise up, even when the world is trying to bring you down.

"I will give you eyes to see. I will give you ears your hear. Even things that were right under your nose that you could not see before, I will illuminate them to you. And you will see, and you will seize. You will see, and you will seize. You will hear and you will know.

"And I am handing out keys to doors of opportunity, and I'm giving you the power to lift up windows of opportunity to go through to places that you've not been before."

I decree in Jesus' name, this is a season of unprecedented opportunity! The risk averse will release great faith. Prayer bowls are tipping over and prophecies are being fulfilled in this season.

Yes, the enemy can bring false opportunities, but you are not going to fall for it because you will remember the prophecies and the prayers. You will discern. You will get confirmation in Scripture. Wise council will back you up. You'll have peace that passes all understanding.

All you need to know now is how to tap into the divine opportunities that come your way.

*Click here to read the rest of this article.* {eoa}

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## **How You Can Avoid This Season of Temptation**

It's the season for temptations, especially for a sugar and comfort food addict like me. However, I never thought of holiday foods as temptations. I thought of them as part of a happy season.

I mean what's Christmas without stockings filled with candy, sugar cookies or hot chocolate?

I thought of the tempting foods like Grandma's pecan pie, oatmeal cake, hot rolls, baked macaroni and cheese casserole, homemade chicken noodle soup, real green beans cooked with a slab of bacon, mashed potatoes, gravy, turkey and marshmallow salad—which is filled with sugar and was the only salad I ever ate—as family traditions.

They weren't temptations because I looked forward to eating my fill of everything. It was true not just of Christmas but every holiday, family birthday and family reunion. We loved

getting together, and delicious food was front and center.

### **Fattening Foods Were My Legacy**

It's no wonder, then, that by the time I was 40, I had gained up to 430 pounds. I had fixed for my family all the fattening foods my Grandma had fed me. It was my way of passing down the family legacy, the family history.

Yet, when a doctor told me I'd be dead in five years from congestive heart failure if I didn't lose weight and keep it off, I finally began to face the truth. I had given into temptation so easily that it had become my lifestyle.

When I'd go to a church potluck dinner and see all the delicious high-calorie desserts and other foods there, I didn't see that as temptation. When I'd notice that someone brought real fruit salad, a nice green salad and slices of baked turkey, I didn't see that as God providing a way of escape from temptation (1 Cor. 10:13). I just thought those people were crazy. Who would eat that when there were all these other yummy foods?

### **Losing Weight While Eating Cookies?**

I first realized I had an issue with food when I was a dirt-poor college student. I was gaining weight and didn't have money to buy larger clothes. I wanted to lose weight and couldn't figure out how to stop eating the foods I loved.

Why was I so tempted to make cookies and eat the entire batch? Sure it was because Grandma fed me those, but where does the desire to continue to eat when I want to lose weight come from?

I was reading through the Bible when a verse sprang off the page, jumped in my heart and brought me an answer to my question. "Temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away. These desires give birth to sinful

actions. And when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death” (James 1:14-15, NLT).

I read further and James 4 confirmed that all my problems stem from the evil desires that war within me. I wish I could say that stopped me and made me change my ways. However, I still didn't know what to do with the cravings that drove me to eat whatever I wanted and ignored any of the ways of escapes God provided.

### **In Food I Trust?**

It wasn't until years later I was able to understand that I wasn't trusting in God; I was trusting in food to get me through any crisis or moment of discomfort. Like Philippians 3:18-20 tells me, my god was my stomach, and my mind was set on earthly things.

Understanding that began to help me put God in His rightful place and learn to surrender to what He desires for me rather than what I want. My desires will always lead me down a treacherous path. I finally understood that the only way to walk out my journey was to surrender completely to God and commit to do what He tells me to do.

In the process, I've lost 250 pounds. I love living closer and closer every day to my Maker. And Christmas? Yeah, for Christmas dinner, I will chose wisely. Likely, it will be turkey, real fruit salad with pecans, green beans and lots of time to enjoy those I love.

*This article originally appeared on .*

Tune into *Sweet Grace for Your Journey with Teresa Shields Parker*, including this episode titled *Unexpected Temptation*, on the Charisma Podcast Network. {eoa}

**Teresa Shields Parker** is the author of six books and two study guides, including her No. 1 bestseller, *Sweet Grace: How I*

Lost 250 Pounds. *Her sixth book, Sweet Surrender: Breaking Strongholds, is available for preorder. She blogs at . She is also a Christian weight loss coach (check out her coaching group at Overcomers Academy) and speaker. Don't miss her podcast, Sweet Grace for Your Journey, available on CPN.*

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## **Deliverance From the Dead-Man Spirit**

Have you ever heard of a dead-man spirit? I had not until I was conversing with a fellow deliverance minister who experienced it.

Immediately, my mind started swirling around the possibilities. Soon, I ran into a good number of people who had this spirit.

So, what did we do? Cast it out.

Discover what the dead-man spirit is and how to break free in this video.

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# Jonathan Cahn Reveals 'The Mystery of the Potter's Field'

In his new blockbuster bestseller *The Harbinger II: The Return*, Jonathan Cahn reveals answers to the consuming questions that people are asking in the midst of today's turmoil: Is the ancient mystery of the harbinger behind the pandemic? Are these current shakings a sign? Is there more to the mystery? Is America heading for judgment?

Cahn's electrifying, long-awaited sequel to *The Harbinger* reveals that the mystery which began with 9/11 has not stopped, but has continued unfolding on American soil. The ancient harbingers that warn of coming judgment have continued to manifest.

In a recent interview with Shannon Scholten, host of *Voice of Truth* television, Cahn talked about several of the mysteries revealed in *The Harbinger II*, including the mystery of the potter's field and its tie to the coronavirus pandemic that has devastated America and the world.

"There can be many causes of one event," Cahn said, referring to the pandemic, "but we also can't overlook the cause of the supernatural and what God says. God allows judgment—He allows things to happen. He's the God of mercy, but He allows things to wake up a nation.

"What has happened upon us is a shaking and wake-up call to America."

## **The Ancient Sin Is Replaying**

Cahn pointed out that God used plagues in the Bible as wake-up calls, as judgments. He cited the prophet Jeremiah (Jer.

7:30-31) as an example. "Jeremiah stood over the Valley of Hinnom—also called Tophet—with a clay vessel in his hand and said to Israel, 'You have murdered children—the blood of the children is here because of what you did, and the same death is going to come to you.' And then he smashed the jar, a sign of coming destruction. The blood of the innocent is what invokes judgment in the Bible."

Cahn went on to say that while Israel killed thousands of children, today we have killed millions through abortion. "This generation that we're in right now has turned away from God more dramatically than any generation in history," he said. "They have killed more babies than any other generation in history. It's the greatest falling away we've ever had."

"Jeremiah said that the judgment which came upon Israel, from sacrificing children in the potter's field in the Valley of Hinnom, was going to come back upon them. It's linked together, and America has followed the template of Israel's fall. The ancient sin is replaying on American soil. The nation gave its blessing and sanction to the sacrificing of its most innocent by legalizing the killing of its unborn children, and celebrating the act."

Cahn pointed out another chilling fact. "The sin of abortion is the sin of the older against the younger. Notice this plague strikes the oldest and spares the youngest. This plague has pinpointed the old, because the killing of children is a sin of the old against the young."

### **The City of Death**

Cahn continued revealing the progression of the plague. "Which nation does more abortions than any other nation?" he asked. "China. Where did the plague begin? China. Which nation has been the model, leading most of the world into abortion? America. America has killed more babies than most nations in the world, by far. And America also kills babies at later

stages than the rest of the world. We have blood on our hands in a big way.”

So what nation has been hit harder by the plague than any other? “America,” said Cahn. “And where in America is the abortion capital? New York. What state was hit harder by the plague than any other? New York, where abortion on demand began in 1970. Then it spread across America. When the Supreme Court voted for the Uniform Abortion Act in 1973, it was based on the law that New York passed in 1970.

“So New York led the nation in abortions, and most of those happen in New York City. So where did the plague center? New York City. It became the city of death.”

Cahn pointed out more shocking parallels from *The Harbinger II*. “When the first case of the plague was identified, it was patient zero in Seattle,” he said. “There was a date next to the headlines that day—it was Jan. 22, the anniversary of the day that America legalized abortion. It was also the anniversary of when New York passed its gruesome law. It comes all back home—it’s all tied together.

“When Jeremiah prophesied, he was at the potter’s gate, by the potter’s field. He said, ‘Because of the children you’re going to be answered by death’ and he also said, ‘There’s going to be so many people dying that you will not be able to contain it here in this field’ (Jeremiah 19:11).

“And that is exactly what happened in New York City,” Cahn said. “There were so many deaths from the COVID-19 plague that the mortuaries and funeral homes could not contain it. So they started shipping out the unclaimed bodies to an island and buried them in a place they called the potter’s field. They named it after the exact place that Jeremiah gave the prophecy from.”

**Is There a Cure?**

Cahn shared another startling revelation from Jeremiah 8. "Jeremiah talks about the judgment that's coming, and he says the famous line, 'Is there no balm in Gilead?' Gilead was the place in ancient Israel where they had the cure, where there was medicine grown to heal you or comfort you. Jeremiah was saying there's no medicine, no cure for this plague of judgment.

"Well, everyone knows that America has been searching for a cure to the plague," Cahn continued, "and in the spring, one company announced that they had something. The name of that company was Gilead Sciences. The FDA gave them emergency approval, and the stock market shot up 500 points because of the announcement of a cure. But it turned out that the cure was very minimal. America is seeking the balm of Gilead but can't get it."

So is there a cure? Is there any hope for America? "The only hope is in the Lord," said Cahn. "We need to return to God. We need repentance and revival. Without that, there is no hope. But the hope is that there is hope! We are the key right now." Since writing *The Harbinger II*, he has been pointing to a key verse:

"If My people, who are called by My name, will humble themselves and pray, and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and will heal their land" (2 Chron. 7:4).

"Revival begins with us," Cahn said. "We can't just be praying for revival; we also have to start living it. It happens when we as God's people take God's word and repent and seek and pray and intercede for this nation. We need the love of God to come in, and to understand where we are as a society because it will be game over if there is not repentance.

"Not just going through the motions," he continued, "not just saying, 'Oh, I repent, we're bad' and then continuing to live

the lifestyle the way we've been living it as Americans. But truly setting our faces towards the Lord, bowing our hearts and really truly repenting for everything. We need to be humbled. If we return—if we fast and pray and humble ourselves at the foot of the cross and truly change our wicked ways—there is hope. We have a choice. We can wake up. It doesn't have to be utter destruction and judgment. There can be a revival." {eoa}

*Find out more at .*

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## **Ever Wonder What Jesus' Childhood Was Like?**

Jesus was born in the shadow of Herod the Great, an anti-Christ figure who was as brilliant as he was wealthy.

He was the greatest builder in the Roman Empire, with a palace larger than Caesar's. He was also very conflicted and paranoid, and in an attempt to kill this newborn rival "King of the Jews," he ordered the murder of all babies in Bethlehem.

Joseph and Mary had taken baby Jesus to Egypt where they lived within a very large Jewish community made up of families who fled the Babylonian conquest of Judah some 500 years earlier. While Jesus' family had a community there that received them, it is fair to say they were refugees.

So, in some ways, Jesus' childhood was quite unusual with the trauma of displacement. However, Herod died soon thereafter, and the young family was able to return to Nazareth, where Jesus grew up like any other Jewish boy at the time.

The Bible is virtually silent about Jesus' childhood years. We do know he had a family of at least six siblings. Other than that, we have to look to other sources to know how He was raised, what he studied and how he grew spiritually.

Join me this week on the *Out of Zion* podcast titled *Jesus' Childhood*, and we will discuss life in Nazareth in the first century and what it tells us about the life of Jesus. This study is Part 2 of our 3D Jesus series. {eoa}

*Dr. Susan Michael is USA Director of the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem and host of the Out of Zion podcast.*

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## **It's Time for All Believers to Trade Prophetic Escapism for the Miraculous**

This year, I have spent a good deal of time studying and thinking about the miracles that took place in the Bible and those whom G-D used to bring forth those miracles. Like most people, this year has seemed much more difficult than my previous years.

We have faced a global pandemic, political upheaval, riots and protests in our streets, and economic calamity and

uncertainty. At times like these, when we look around and see that the situation surrounding us is beyond our control or ability to fix, most people of faith like myself look for answers in G-D's Word.

So, while some of my friends were prophesying about how G-D was going to protect and preserve us during these difficult days, other friends were prophesying about political victories or political calamity concerning one candidate or the other. I did my best to focus my attention on reading the Bible and telling those who would listen that G-D was still in control. I tried to constantly remind people that the answer for every situation is written in the Bible if we would just listen to His still small voice written in those pages instead of listening to the voices shouting on the internet.

As I studied these miracles, I came to two undeniable conclusions.

The first is that G-D used people to bring forth every redemptive miracle we read about in the Bible. This means that it was G-D's perfect will to combine His perfection with our imperfection, powered by our faith, to bring about supernatural solutions to our difficult situations.

The Bible is filled with heroes of faith and, without exception, every one of them were failed human beings. In simpler terms, every biblical hero was also a sinner, just like you and me.

The second is that these redemptive miracles all took place at the end of a difficult time or experience. In other words, if there were no difficulties, there would also have been no miracles.

Daniel would not have survived the lions if he was never cast into the den. The three Hebrews would not have been walking around in the fire if they had not been cast into the furnace. Moses would not have held his rod before the Red Sea if Israel

had not spent 400 years in slavery. David would not have slain Goliath with a slingshot if the Philistines had not for many years tormented the Israelites. Paul would have never shared the message of Messiah with kings and Caesars if he wasn't arrested and imprisoned.

Let's not forget the greatest miracle of all: Yeshua would not have provided our miraculous redemption through resurrection power if it wasn't for the crucifixion.

This brings me to one more conclusion and the reason I am writing this today. Most of the prophetic words being shared by men this year have been about providing means of escape for the trials and tribulations of 2020. These words encouraged us as believers that if we will just have strong enough faith, then COVID-19 will go away; the riots, protests and destruction will end; the right candidate will win the election; the economy will be restored and so on.

While I, in my flesh, wish the above was true and biblically consistent, from what I see, the great heroes of faith we read about in the Bible were strongest in their faith inside the times of difficulty, not as a means of escaping their tribulation. In other words, they were faithful when tribulation began and, because they continued to walk out their faith inside their crisis, their crisis ended with a miracle.

But, not one of them avoided their crisis, and honestly, I don't think we will either. Our victory isn't about overcoming sickness, political upheaval or even religious persecution. As Yeshua (Jesus) said in John 16:33 (TLV):

"These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have shalom. In the world you will have trouble, but take heart! I have overcome the world!"

Let me end with this thought. Every one of us is in the middle of the preparation to experience a great miracle. This miracle

is not about a virus, a political candidate, a social revolution or financial breakthrough, but I promise you that when it happens, it will be out of this world.

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## **How God Gives Believers Kingdom Power for Spiritual Warfare Until He Comes**

*Note: This is the final in a four-part series. [Click here for parts one, two and three.](#)*

As we studied earlier, the word “advent” means “coming” or “visit.” The four Sundays prior to the observance of our Lord’s birth provide teachable moments for believers to review the history and meaning of Christ’s first coming and give added discernment and understanding to the promises and hope of His Second Coming.

At His first coming, He was the divine visitor. At His Second Coming, he will be the divine victor. His first coming was as

a baby, meek and mild. His second coming will display kingdom authority, spiritual warfare and sovereign control.

As we are waiting for the return of our Lord, we need to be reminded of the supernatural and spiritual dimensions of His first coming to better understand the unfolding spiritual dimensions of His Second Coming.

The essence of Christmas revolves around the person and purpose of Jesus of Nazareth, who was given by our Creator God "in the fullness of time" so that "the world through him [Jesus] might be saved" (Gal. 4:4-5, John 3:16-17).

Yet, it is important to review the role of the "Spirit of Christmas" (the Holy Spirit of God), in both Christ's first coming and the promised Second Coming. Consider these steps of Holy Spirit-involvement in our Lord's first Advent and ministry preparation.

1. Jesus was supernaturally conceived in the womb of his earthly mother Mary (*Miriam* in Hebrew), by the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1:18; Luke 1:26-38). This was confirmed to Mary's fiancé, Joseph, by an angel (Matt. 1:19-20).
2. During His "growing years," in obscurity in Galilee, the Holy Spirit developed character qualities and spiritual graces within His life (Luke 2:39-40, 52), similar to the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in our growing lives as believers.
3. Later, when Jesus was about 30 years of age, he went to be baptized of John the Baptist (Luke 3:21-23) and the Holy Spirit, descending from heaven in a bodily form like a dove, came upon Him to enable a ministry of power and good works (Luke 3:22, 4:18-19). Then the third member of the Godhead spoke as a voice from heaven, affirming His pleasure in the Son.

## **Kingdom Power for Spiritual Warfare**

Today—while we are waiting for Christ’s second coming—the Spirit will produce the fruit of the Holy Spirit within us and wants to come upon us to empower us for kingdom ministries and spiritual warfare (see Acts 1:8, 2:4, 4:8, 10:44-45, 13:9).

This indwelling Holy Spirit baptizes believers into the body of Christ and equips them with various manifestations of spiritual blessings to be delivered as grace-gifts within the congregations of assembled believers. These are to be used in orderly and edifying ways, “for the profit of all” (1 Cor. 12:1-11).

Additionally, we learn from the apostle Jude that this Holy Spirit of God will help us to meaningfully pray to the Father. We can build upon and strengthen the spiritual foundation of our holy faith by “praying in the Holy Spirit” (Jude 1:20-21). This Holy Spirit-prompted and enabled prayer language is usually subsequent to and different from the salvation experience (Acts 10:44-46).

It bypasses our own thought processes and speaks directly to God in words unknown to us (Acts 2:4, 1 Corinthians 14:2). Paul explained to the Romans that when we don’t know for what or how we should pray, this Spirit-assisted prayer “makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered” (Rom. 8:26-27, NKJV).

Finally, in the prophetic book of Revelation, this Holy Spirit speaks affirmation and correction to real and representative congregations of the early church, with application throughout the church age and to us, today. Seven times in this final book (see Rev. 2-3, MEV) we read: “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” Let us listen, learn and discern!

### **Until He Comes**

Having reviewed the role of the Holy Spirit in the first and Second Coming of Christ, it would be important to underscore

that the devil knows that “his time is short” (Rev. 12:12). While we are waiting for the “end of all things,” he goes about like “a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet. 4:7; 5:8).

That is why the Holy Spirit gives us the power to enable us to stand strong in resisting “deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons” (1 Tim. 4:1-2, NKJV). We must avoid those who have “a form of godliness but [deny] its power” (2 Tim. 3:1-5). These will lead to a predicted great apostasy and the emergence of “the man of sin.” This “lawless one” will perform deceiving acts “according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders” (see 2 Thess. 2:3-12).

Against these evil ones, in these end times, the apostle Paul instructed the Ephesians (and us!) to “Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For our fight is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, and against spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done all, to stand” (Eph. 6:11-13, MEV). {eoa}

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# R.T. Kendall: Why We Were All Born Pharisees

You may remember from your reading of the New Testament that Pharisees are portrayed almost entirely as bad guys. Jesus used negative words such as “hypocrites” and “fools” to describe them—for good reason.

But it may surprise you to learn that He was referring to modern-day people, also. To find out why, let’s take a deeper look at what Pharisaism is.

Pharisaism is the belief and practice of an ancient Jewish sect called Pharisees. They apparently emerged in the second century BC and thrived during the time of Jesus. They were a strict sect made up mostly of ordinary Jews, unlike the Sadducees, who were members of the families of priests. The Pharisees were far more numerous than the Sadducees but not as prestigious.

The Pharisees kept closely to the Mosaic Law. But they often embellished the Law with countless rules that were difficult to keep. For example, they considered such things as walking more than a kilometer from one’s town, carrying any kind of load, or lighting a fire in their home on the Sabbath to be work—and it was against the law to work on this holy day of rest. Their rules made people strive to keep the law in every detail.

The Aramaic word for Pharisee means one who is separated. The Pharisees were known for their adherence to tradition, especially strictness of religious observance. They saw themselves as a cut above everybody else and looked down on those who did not follow the same rules. The popular perception of Pharisaism as the essence of self-righteousness seems fair and just based on Jesus’ descriptions of those who

were members of the sect.

The Free Dictionary defines Pharisaism as “(1) the doctrines and practices of Pharisees and (2) hypocritical observance of the letter of religious or moral law without regard for the spirit; sanctimoniousness.” It goes on to say that Pharisaism is “the behavior of a sanctimonious and self-righteous person.” One definition of sanctimonious is making a show of being morally superior to other people. It can also refer to making your face indicate (sometimes with a frown or even tears showing grave concern) how moral, godly, or holy you think you are—or what you want others to think you are. Pharisees were experts at this. The universal perception of them as a self-righteous lot is understandable.

But here’s the kicker: We are *all* born Pharisees! We are all—without exception—born with a deadly predisposition to self-righteousness. It is the essence of original sin. Another way of putting it is that self-righteousness is essentially defensiveness. That is what you see in the original sin of Adam and Eve: defensiveness. After Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, their self-righteousness and defensiveness surfaced quickly. Neither blamed themselves. Neither said, “I have sinned; I am so sorry.” The opposite was true.

Adam blamed Eve. “The woman whom you gave to be with me—she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate” (Gen. 3:12, ESV). One might even infer that Adam was blaming God; he was essentially saying, “The woman You gave to be with me made me do it—it is Your fault because You gave her to me.”

Eve then blamed the serpent who had tempted her. “The serpent deceived me, and I ate” (v. 13). We don’t need to be taught Pharisaism; it is as natural as eating apple pie. This is the way we are all born—as Adam was after the fall. No person since Adam’s fall in Eden has been born as Adam was originally created—without sin. The Bible tells us: “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive

me” (Ps. 51:5). We all “go astray from birth, speaking lies” (Ps. 58:3). This is why it is written,

None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands, no one seeks for God. All have turned aside, together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one. Their throat is an open grave, they use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps is under their lips. Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes. (Rom. 3:10-18).

In a word: “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). We are not sinners merely because we sin; we sin because we are born sinners. The essence of sin is self-righteousness.

The issue, therefore, is not how to *become* a Pharisee but how to *be rid* of Pharisaism! Is it possible to be completely rid of it? Paul said that “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Cor. 3:17). The more we are filled with the Spirit, the less defensive and self-righteous we are. We must continually seek to be more and more so because self-righteousness is a serious matter to God. {eoa}

*Excerpted from chapter 1 of You Might Be a Pharisee If... by R.T. Kendall (Charisma House, 2021).*

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# What Does the First Christmas Teach Us About the End of Days?

*Note: This is third of a four-part series about Advent. Click [here](#) for part one and [here](#) for part two.*

Jesus used vivid, prophetic and symbolic language to describe His promised future return, which will affect the earth, sun, moon and stars (Matt. 24:29-30). John the Revelator seems to speak of these same cosmic disturbances but adds that every mountain and island will be moved out of its place (Rev. 6:14).

Isaiah says that in the day of the Lord's "fierce anger" the earth will be "moved out of her place," which may imply out of her orbit (Isa. 13:13, JUB). This may explain why Isaiah later says the earth will be "shaken exceedingly" (Isa. 24:19, NKJV) and "reel to and fro like a drunkard" (Isa. 24:20).

In the face of these great cosmic disturbances and ecological catastrophes, men who survive will hide in caves and beg the mountains and rocks to fall on them and "hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb" (Rev. 6:12-16). It is as though they think "the sky is falling on us!" Yet, the Scripture says they will not repent of their deeds nor give God glory (Rev. 16:9,11).

## **The First Christmas and the End of Days**

This current Christmastime Advent series has come out of the context of my own life in recent months, as I studied Scriptures and wrote an article for *Charisma* magazine's December issue. The editorial team requested that I write the cover article about "what the first Christmas can tell us about the end of days."

Since biblical prophecy has always been of interest to me, you may have noticed that many of my blog-posts touch or focus on that category. From the announcement of Christ's first coming to the completion of His Second Coming, Scriptures call on God's chosen-ones to learn to faithfully watch, eagerly wait and diligently work for the Second Coming of Jesus of Nazareth, the Jewish Messiah and the Gentiles' Savior.

He is coming to resurrect the righteous dead and "catch away" (rapture) the living saints (1 Thess. 4:13-18). Simultaneously, He is also coming to finally judge the wicked in righteous and wrathful vengeance (2 Pet. 3:3-9; Rev. 6:17).

### **Sounds Like Greek to Me**

Four Greek words are used in 35 verses of the New Testament when referring to the second "coming" of Christ. The four terms and their frequency of use are *parousia* (16), *erkomai* (8), *epiphania* (6) and *apokalupsis* (5). The context surrounding the use of each of these words adds perspective to this long-promised, prophetic event of the ages.

I anticipate doing more study and writing on these terms and related teachings in the near future. But, for now, let me summarize the usage of these special words by saying that when speaking of the entire event of the second coming, *parousia* is used and means a physical and continuing presence. When the perspective relates to believers seeing Him "coming" to review and reward our works with promised crowns and blessings, *epiphania* is used and means a bright manifestation or visible "appearance" of His godly glory, yielding happy, affirming joy for believers.

The third Greek word is, perhaps unknowingly, the more familiar because *apokalupsis* means "revelation" and is used when something which was previously unknown or hidden is unveiled, uncovered or revealed. Paul told the Thessalonians that our Lord Jesus will be "revealed (*apokalupsis*) from

heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire" (2 Thess. 1:6-8a). Peter taught that the "proof of our faith" will result in praise and glory and honor "at the *revelation (apokalupsis)* of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:7, 13).

The apostle John is known for his prophetic writings in the final book of the New Testament. These profound words are revealed as "the Revelation (*apokalupsis*) of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John, who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw" (Rev. 1:1-2).

The final Greek word used for Christ's second "coming" is *erkomai* and is consistently used when the Scripture speaks from the unbelievers' perspective and of their appropriate fear of His judgments, appearance and presence. It is "the opposite side of the coin" from *epiphania*, which is the same event, but from the believers' perspective. One is the future time of feared judgment on the wicked, and the other side is the believer's longed-for "appearance" of our Deliverer from the "wrath to come" (1 Thess. 1:9-10).

### **The Day of the Lord**

The wrath of God will be manifested in the future prophetic-period known in Scripture as the Day of the Lord, which occurs at the end of this age. It is when God's wrath is finally released in the judgment of unbelievers and when Antichrist (the "beast") will be defeated and cast into the lake of fire and brimstone forever with the false prophet. They will be joined later by Satan himself, after being chained in the abyss of the bottomless pit during the entire millennium (Rev. 20:7-10).

Scripture describes the Day of the Lord as a time of radical destruction and cosmic redesign, when "the heavens will pass

away with a loud noise, and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat” (2 Pet. 3:10b, MEV). In view of this dramatic and dark prospect, Peter then asks “what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness” (2 Pet. 3:11b)?

Paul begged and urged the Thessalonians to live a life that is set apart and dedicated to pleasing God. He transparently reminded them that “this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality, that each one of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in the lust of depravity, even as the Gentiles who do not know God, and that no man take advantage of and defraud his brother in any matter, because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, as we also have forewarned you and testified. For God has not called us to uncleanness, but to holiness. Therefore, he that despises does not despise man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit” (1 Thess. 4:3-8, MEV).

How good it is to know that “God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation (deliverance) through the Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him” (1 Thess. 5:10, NKJV).

No wonder Paul then concludes this instruction about the Day of the Lord by saying, “Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing” (1 Thess. 5:11). After all, “He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it” (2 Thess. 5:24).

Stay tuned for the final installment, *Avoiding Apostasy in the Last Days*. {eoa}

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