



Three Strikes & You're Out

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware. (1 Corinthians 12:1)

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus...For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. (1 Thessalonians 4:13-14, 16-17)

For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud and all passed through the sea; and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; (1 Corinthians 10:1-2)

The words underlined in each of the above passages all come from the same Greek word "agnoeo" which many translations render as "to be ignorant". The word is used to not just advise that we should not lack information on the highlighted issues, but should go out of our way to avoid being mistaken or in error where such things are concerned. In other words, Paul specifically admonishes Christians that they are to understand, pay attention to, and not be biblically ignorant where three issues are concerned: spiritual gifts, the Rapture, and Israel. Why is it that at the center of present-day Christianity we find the

most commonplace error and ignorance on at least one if not all three of these topics?

There are literally thousands of books, sermons, and entire websites devoted to each of these three individual issues so it is impossible to deal with each of them in total depth here, but at least consider the global effect at large. On each of these topics I have heard the case made that they do not belong to the core doctrines of Christianity and therefore differences over them should not be allowed to divide the Body of Christ. But the issue I am raising is not that there might be “differences” but total “ignorance”. Can you see that claiming they are not important and yet at the same time not possessing a clear, biblical understanding of them is **exactly** what Paul is warning against?

One of the chief reasons that Christians flock together in stadium-sized numbers to embrace the outrageous and non-biblical public display of so-called manifestations of the Spirit is they are ignorant of spiritual gifts to begin with. As Jacob Prasch of Moriel Ministries has repeatedly pointed out, one of the biblically identified fruits of the Spirit is “*egkrateia*” – “self-control”. (It is but one of nine attributes listed in Gal. 5:22-23.) And yet the biblically ignorant actually claim, “It must be the Spirit; I have no control over it!”

But at the same time there is such a division over one specific gift of the Spirit – tongues, that there is a parade of ignorance on display even among the more sedated, average churchgoer. On one extreme end of the spectrum are those who ignore the biblical guidelines and employ it willy-nilly without regard for Scriptural restraint; at the other end are those who insist the gifts ceased to operate with the passing of the original Apostles and the 1st Century church and therefore no longer exist. Charismaniacs rush to one side of the stage while Cessasionists surge to the other. And meanwhile the unsaved looking in on us from the outside are not completely unreasonable to conclude, based on our public displays in this area, that this Christian stuff is nonsense.

“Three Strikes & You’re Out”, Page 2 of 7

Biblical ignorance of spiritual gifts not only undermines the basic work of discipleship and sanctification in each believer's life but erodes public testimony to the unsaved.

The second issue Paul warns about is the Rapture. Yes, "Rapture" is actually derived from the Latin and is not a word literally found in Scripture. The Greek word is "*harpazo*" and clearly means to be plucked or snatched away. (I do sometimes wonder if we would be better served to discard "Rapture" and employ "Harpazo" instead, but the term is hopelessly etched in the discussion. I will give it a shot.)

Practically a whole industry has arisen over the question of the Harpazo. Not content with describing a position as "Pre-Trib", "Mid-Trib", "Post-Trib", or even "Pre-Wrath", there are many variations. Now if you have arrived at a particular position as the result of prayerful study of God's Word, let's talk! We can even have a scholarly debate! But can you see the problem where the only reason an individual Christian or even an entire organization defends a particular position is because they learned it from a Christian work of fiction? Or because some book on prophecy tells them so?

I am not saying every book, fiction or otherwise, is wrong no matter what, but simply that there are two very large groups of Christians where this topic is concerned: those whose beliefs come from other people's opinions rather than having them personally verified in God's Word, and those who embrace the false doctrine that where the topic of the Harpazo is concerned, ignorance is truly bliss. Obtaining one's theology from someone else's commentary on a topic is just as hopeless as sticking your fingers in your ears and singing loudly.

Again, I am not saying that my particular belief is the only right one and everyone else had better get on board. I am pleading that you go to God in prayer, open your Bible, and dig for the whole counsel of God so that your faith is grounded in God's truth. Confirm that the

opinions expressed in such books are biblically supported. Do not continue to press forward **uninformed**.

But this particular gateway has led to all manner of false teaching and deception, and I am not exclusively referring to espoused differences as to the **timing** of the Harpazo; there are those who profess **no** Harpazo at all! This has led to a general malaise if not intentional dismissal of Bible prophecy by very large and well-known groups. Despite the fact that Jesus Himself repeatedly warns in the Olivet Discourse (Mt. 24-25) to "*be alert*" and "*do not be deceived*", such well-known leaders as Rick Warren advocate **against** studying prophecy or being distracted by End Times issues. I cannot decide what is more ignorant: not clearly understanding the Harpazo according to the way God's Word explains it or deciding to ignore God's Word on the subject altogether.

Where we ultimately arrive on the issue of the Harpazo is foundational because it cannot be extracted from our faith in the entire work of Christ, both in this life and the one to come.

But if the exotic differences for the application of the gifts of the Spirit and the doctrine of the Harpazo are not enough, we have the issue of literal Israel. These three issues plagued the church even before the close of the 1st Century church, which is why the Apostles addressed them specifically. And they have been lingering in every subsequent era of history ever since.

Once upon a time the mainstream Evangelical teaching where literal Israel is concerned embraced Paul's teaching word-for-word, expressing the fact that God is not through with Israel yet and will ultimately fulfill every promise He made to them. In fact, most would have tied this issue to the Harpazo stating that one of the main purposes for extracting the church is for God to once again use and finish His work through literal Israel. But instead the mainstream view has been supplanted by variations of Replacementism.

For the uninitiated this is the belief that God is through with Israel, they had their chance and blew it, and now everything has been given over to the church in its place. Every time a Scripture mentions "Israel", adherents of Replacementism substitute "the church" and claim it no longer applies to literal Israel but exclusively to the New Testament body of believers. Never mind what Paul says in Romans and Corinthians, never mind that God by His very nature is incapable of not fulfilling literal promises He made to Israel, they have been replaced!

Once you begin to travel down this path the ultimate destination and wayward sights along the way are quite interesting and about as far from Scripture as one can go. One of the first stops has a lot of related names: "Dominionism", "Triumphalism", "Kingdom Now Theology", etc. They all describe the notion that Christ will not return until the church – yes, the literal church on earth – conquers the world for Christ as a prelude to ushering in the Millennial Reign. (I find no satisfaction in pointing out the irony of how false beliefs concerning the spiritual gifts and the Harpazo compound and often contribute to this false teaching.) Some actually come to the conclusion there is no Millennial Reign at all.

Even worse, this has led to a history of anti-Semitism and overt hatred of not just the nation Israel but its individual people. What kind of blindness is able to get a Christian who is supposed to love others and share the Gospel with every nation, race, and person on the earth to come to hate and despise one particular nation, race, or person? Error begets error; one false doctrine leads to further false doctrines; ignorance of a foundational truth erodes the foundation itself until the whole house collapses.

The three things which Paul specifically admonishes we should be biblically grounded in to the point of stating categorically **not** to be uninformed, ignorant, or in error regarding are the three things in

which most people claiming the label "Christian" are actually most ignorant, uninformed, and steeped in biblical error.

At this point it would be easy to slide into a discussion of how this is a reflection of the apostasy of the Last Days which is undoubtedly taking place, but I would offer that it might be compounded by Paul's observation that in the Last Days the core issue is the lack of faithfulness. If people are not embracing and putting God's Word into practice in the course of their daily life, how can we possibly expect them to do so where such foundational doctrines are concerned?

But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these. (2 Timothy 3:1-5)

Show me a person, group, or organization embracing an extreme mistreatment of one or more of the foundational issues discussed above and we will find these behaviors at the root cause of the problem. Paul explained to Timothy that unfaithfulness to the everyday admonitions of God's Word is what leads to deception where the greater foundational truths are concerned.

Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men of depraved mind, rejected in regard to the faith. But they will not make further progress; for their folly will be obvious to all, just as Jannes's and Jambres's folly was also. (2 Timothy 3:8-9)

"*Their folly*" where the Spiritual gifts are concerned, "*their folly*" where God's plan for the literal nation of Israel is concerned, "*their folly*" where the Harpazo is concerned. Ignorance is not bliss and never has been.

In His Love,

Servant@WalkWithTheWord.org

"Three Strikes & You're Out", Page 7 of 7

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