

# We Have Met the Beast, and He is Us

by  
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## PREFACE

I apologize for not appearing personally at the Summer Institute, and I thank Jack Crabtree for being willing to read my paper. I also thank you for being willing to listen to it. Part of the purpose of each Summer Institute is to afford the opportunity for those who are not officially students at Gutenberg College to experience its classroom environment where students seek to understand the writings of an author and to help one another to do so in discussion. Plus, most authors that the students read seem to find some excuse for not appearing personally at the school, such as the fact that they lived 2400 years ago. Therefore, I believe that I am in good company.

I also apologize to Paula Belcher for not capitalizing the first letter of “he” and “him” when I refer to God. Jack did not capitalize this letter in his paper, and I felt it to be ok to provide some kind of consistency by following suit.

## INTRODUCTION

After victory in the Battle of Lake Erie during the War of 1812, American Commodore Oliver Perry sent this dispatch to General William Harrison, “We have met the enemy, and they are ours.” One hundred and fifty-seven years later, Walt Kelly, the political cartoonist and satirist modified Perry’s words for his purposes on a 1970 Earth Day poster. This poster depicted the main character of his cartoon, Pogo, standing in a trash filled Okefenokee Swamp and saying, “We have met the enemy, and he is us.” In the light of Jack Crabtree’s paper, “How to Follow Jesus When You Cannot Kill the Beast,” I would like to borrow both Commodore Perry’s and Walt Kelly’s words and claim that “We have met the Beast, and he is us.”

In his paper, Jack applies the biblical concept of the Beast of Revelation to American society and its growing propensity to display its hostility toward the Bible and truth. Here, in my paper, I would like to discuss further the characteristics of the biblical concept of the Beast and demonstrate how they apply ultimately to each and every one of us as human beings. In turn, I also want to show that each of us has contributed to the demise of American culture, and, biblically speaking, we just cannot help ourselves in doing so.

I am not going to be very complimentary of human beings and human nature, and I am going to make some broad, sweeping statements that are partly intended to encourage each of us *individually* to take spiritual inventory before God. I certainly do not claim to know who is a person of authentic faith and who is not. This is for God and God alone to know, besides the person himself. I also want to point out that each of us plays an important and divine role in God’s overall project. In other words, an honest assessment of human beings and human nature throughout all of human history is rather grim in the midst of the wonder and awe of God, who transcends the creation in a manner that we can barely fathom. Thus, in the midst of the wonder of God, we can know that he is constantly bringing into existence a story that features him primarily as the sole architect of all created reality. God’s story also, but only secondarily, features human beings—indeed, morally depraved, corrupt, degenerate, debased, vile, perverted, loathsome, repulsive, and utterly despicable human beings, which each and every one of us is.

I told you that I was not going to be complimentary of human beings. But valid, unfavorable statements about humanity and their moral abilities is the only honest, realistic, and biblical evaluation of us. In stark contrast, I am infinitely complimentary of God, his moral nature, his abilities, and his activities, which is the only honest, realistic, and biblical evaluation of him. Part of the problem with humanity is that we constantly reverse these assessments and think much too highly of ourselves, while we question and repudiate God's goodness and wisdom, indeed, his very existence. However, he ain't the Beast. We are the Beast. Therefore, every living moment of a human being's existence is one where each of us should be saying, "We have met the Beast, and he is us."

In this paper, I will discuss five specific human Beasts –

1. The Beast of Revelation that opposes Israel who are the physical descendants of Abraham and who have been set apart by God to be his people in the temporal realm
2. The Beast of American Society that opposes God and biblical truth within the country called The United States of America
3. The Beast of American Government that opposes God and biblical truth with power and authority derived from American Society
4. The Beast of the American Church that opposes God and biblical truth while claiming to worship God and uphold the Bible
5. The Beast of each Existing Individual Human Being who opposes God and biblical truth either –

a. While remaining fundamentally committed to opposing God and his truth through either –

- i. Abject, moral, and obvious rebellion toward God, or
- ii. Relatively good appearing and secular citizenship within America, or
- iii. Relatively good appearing and religious citizenship within America

or,

b. While having been inwardly and miraculously changed by God's grace so that the Beastly Existing Individual Human Being is fundamentally committed to following God and his truth

Finally, in this paper, I will give my own brief description of what I believe is the teaching of the Bible on how we should live in the face of all these Beasts. My description will not be all that different from Jack's in his paper, but I would like to highlight one thing in particular that I think is important for all human beings to realize.

My assumptions, as I approach this subject, are those that I have held for many years and which I have searched far and wide for refutation, because I believe that my main, intellectual desire is to know and understand truth. If someone can refute my assumptions, I am all ears. By the way, my definition of truth is those concepts and ideas that we human beings can create in our minds that accurately correspond to the reality in which we exist. Actually, this is a limited definition of truth. My full definition is those concepts and ideas that God can produce in his mind that accurately correspond to the reality of him and of that which he has created. In light of this definition of truth, my assumptions are –

1. God exists and is the ultimate Creator of the reality that is separate from him. Consequently, our understanding of the created reality and our actions must always take him into account, or we are thinking and acting on the basis of a miniscule amount of all reality.
2. Truth is rational and always makes sense, even if we cannot understand it completely. To believe an idea that ultimately does not make sense is to believe a falsehood and a lie.
3. The Bible is the only inerrant and authoritative source of truth about God and the created reality. To permit anyone other than the biblical authors, whether formulators of constitutions, laws, creeds, textbooks, articles, papers, etc. to be our source of truth is to embark on a path of foolishness.

## THE BEAST OF REVELATION

Four thousand years ago, God made certain promises to a Semitic man named Abraham living in Mesopotamia, what is now southern Iraq.<sup>1</sup> Since then, God has been in the process of fulfilling these promises, that include not only that Abraham would have descendants through his son Isaac, the people whom we call the Jews, but also that God would make of the Jews “a great nation.” God also gave a particular plot of land to the Jews that is basically that which the country of modern Israel occupies. However, since about 2000 B.C. when God made these promises to Abraham, two things have been true about the Jews. One, they have been opposed by nation after nation in defiance of God and his choosing the Jews to be his people. Two, they have “opposed” themselves in defiance of God and his choosing them to be his people.

### The Beast Outside Israel

In the first case, the Jews have always had a human Beast who has sought to destroy them and thwart God’s purposes of developing them into a people who follow and obey him from their hearts. As Jack pointed out in his paper, this Beast is also satanically motivated, so that even the spiritual realm composed of beings who defy and rebel against God have participated in this goal of destroying the Jews. However, I suggest that the human beings who have comprised the Beast of Jewish destruction have never needed much help from invisible, satanic beings to be motivated in pursuing their goal. I conclude this on the basis of what the Bible says about all human beings since the time of Adam and Eve—that each one is fundamentally hostile toward God and his purposes.

For example, the apostle Paul provides a rather bleak assessment of the moral condition of mankind in Romans 1 –

1. That all men “suppress the truth” about God and reality through their thoughts, motivations, and actions that are evil
2. That all men engage in “futile...speculations” about an explanation of reality, so that God can rightly judge them to be “fools” who are constantly and intentionally misunderstanding reality
3. That all men pursue the “evil desires of their hearts” right into the depth of even sexual immorality

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<sup>1</sup> Originally, this man’s name was Abram (= Exalted Father), and then God changed it to Abraham (= perhaps. Father of Many). Cf. Genesis 11:27-12:3 and Genesis 17:1-8.

4. That all men are “filled with all...wickedness, greed, evil..., envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice,” slander, insolence, arrogance, lack of understanding, lack of trustworthiness, lack of love, and lack of mercy

In addition, to top it off, Paul says that every human being knows that he is a rebel against God and that he deserves God’s eternal condemnation. Yet, every human being pursues his arrogant defiance of God with reckless abandon and encourages all other human beings to do likewise.

Paul’s explanation of man’s morally corrupt condition is merely longer than that of God’s in Genesis 6:5 just before the flood, “Yahweh saw the great evil of man on the earth, that is, that every intent of the thoughts in his heart was only evil all day long” (my translation). In this same story, we would like to think that Noah found favor with God because God did not assess him as a man of “great evil.” However, I suggest that Noah was just as evil as the rest of humanity except for God’s having miraculously changed him inwardly, so that he fundamentally desired to escape his all-day-long-evil in eternity.

Certainly, these evaluations of the human condition by God and Paul are very offensive to us. Our immediate reaction to God’s saying to us that we are always evil and to Paul’s saying to us that we are filled with evil is, but not I. To the contrary, God and Paul do not leave anyone out, not even Paul. The only human being who stands outside these judgments is Jesus of Nazareth, the very incarnation of God and the Messiah. The rest of us must include ourselves in the morally despicable humanity that God and Paul describe, or we demonstrate just how much we are the very fools whom Paul says that we are. Either way, we are the Beast.

However, before we go this direction in our discussion, we can see that it is a very small step from the biblical description of the human condition to the Beasts in the Ancient Near East—the Assyrians, the Egyptians, the Babylonians, the Medes, the Persians, the Romans, et al.— who sought to defy God and destroy his plans and purposes for the Jewish people, whether or not they understood completely these plans and purposes.

It is this same Beast who rears his ugly head in the Book of Revelation. The Jews have always had their Beasts, their enemies, who have sought to destroy them and thwart God’s plans. Witness the efforts of Hitler and Nazi Germany or of Stalin and the Russian pogroms. The Beast at the end of history will be no different. He will attempt one more time to gain ascendancy over God—but he will fail.

God has not yet fulfilled all his promises that he made to Abraham and his descendants, the Jews. They have never lived completely securely on the land of Israel, unmolested by their enemies. They have never been a “great nation,” indeed, the greatest nation on earth whom all the gentiles will respect and to whom they will look for guidance and instruction on worshiping the one true God. And the Beast has always sought to prevent this from happening and will try one more time before the next appearance of the Messiah, Jesus. However, once the Messiah returns, he will eventually crush the Beast forever and free Israel and the Jews from their enemies.

### The Beast Inside Israel

Not only have the Jews’ enemies resided outside the nation of Israel, but they also have dwelt within it. This is to be expected if God’s and the apostle Paul’s assessment of humanity is not only correct, but also universal. No one can claim to be a good person, not even the Jews. Indeed, they have the promises of God to their benefit and the best weapons to combat the deceptions of the world—the Hebrew scriptures with all the

covenants.<sup>2</sup> Their Bible is the one necessary tool with which to build a coherent understanding of reality. Therefore, the problem is not the quality of available tools and material for constructing a proper worldview that is in accord with God's understanding of reality. The problem is mankind's immoral condition, in which the Jews participate just as much as the gentiles.

I want to make this clear, because the Jews have been convenient targets throughout history for gentiles' accusations of improper and even heinous behavior. Christians, especially, have taken the liberty to call Jews "Christ killers." Yes, the Jewish leadership of the day were complicit with the Romans in executing Jesus of Nazareth on a cross, and the New Testament points out that this was, in effect, the execution of their own Messiah, King, and High Priest who was "of the order of Melchizedek" (cf. Hebrews 1-10). In addition, gentiles have felt justified in their criticism of the Jews for such behavior, because so many gentiles have apparently done the very opposite and embraced Jesus as the Messiah and Savior of both Israel and the world. However, the biblical message is that all human beings are equally hostile toward God and his Messiah, meaning that the Jews are no more wicked and evil than the gentiles. Or, to put it another way, all the gentiles are equally evil as all the Jews as a result of mankind's inherent moral depravity that has existed within every human being since the days of Adam and Eve, i.e., since the beginning.

Therefore, I am not accusing the Jews of being "Christ killers" as though the gentiles are not. Indeed, I am a "Christ killer." You are a "Christ killer." Every human being is a "Christ killer," because every human being is a morally corrupt and hostile Beast. Nevertheless, the Hebrew scriptures feature the events of the Jews who were both God's people and oftentimes disobedient to God in the Ancient Near East, leading up to the appearance of Jesus of Nazareth two thousand years ago. In addition, the New Testament describes certain events involving some Jews who were obedient to God and some Jews who were disobedient to God in the Roman Empire shortly after Jesus' first appearance. It can, thus, seem as though the Jews are more evil than other human beings. However, I suggest that the Bible says that this is not the case. We are all equally depraved, despicable, and morally abhorrent to God.

Yet, as we examine the texts of the Old Testament, we find that God constantly reached out to his chosen people, the Jews, through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Joshua, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and other prophets, with the consistent result that the nation of Israel rebelled against him and defied him time after time. They were and are the chosen people of God within the temporal realm, and, yet, they are their own Beast.

For example, God laments of the Jews through Isaiah,

I have spread out My hands all day long to a rebellious people, who walk  
in the way which is not good, following their own thoughts. <Isaiah 65:2>.

The promise of God to Abraham is that one day the "rebellious people" of the nation of Israel will become an "obedient people" from their hearts. In the meantime, the Beast of Revelation outside the community of the Jews is lurking on the horizon as the time of the end of this temporary creation draws near, and the Beast within the community of the Jews continues to thrash around to the degree that God has not yet miraculously changed the hearts of all Jews and caused them to become a whole nation of inwardly "obedient people."

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<sup>2</sup> I would claim that the Greek scriptures, i.e., the New Testament, is just as much a part of the Jews' Bible, because it describes *their* Messiah. However, out of deference to them, because they currently acknowledge only the Hebrew scriptures, I state that it alone is their Bible.

## THE BEAST OF AMERICAN SOCIETY

Jack has provided a very adequate analysis of the Beast of American Society. The culture of America, indeed, the cultures of every nation and people on earth, have been progressing in their hostility to the Bible and God's truth. However, as I explained above, progress in antipathy to the Bible has existed since the beginning of human history with Adam and Eve. This is also to say that each culture's progress is relative. At certain times, God has seen fit to lead some sectors of humanity in the direction of authentic faith and pursuit of moral goodness instead of toward further aggressive manifestations of rebellion against him. For example, King Josiah (640-609 B.C.) and the Jews of the southern Kingdom of Judah turned away from their idolatry and sought to be genuinely obedient to God (2 Kings 22-23). Also, it is remarkable that so many gentiles in the Roman Empire embraced the Jewish Jesus as their King and Savior as a result of hearing the New Testament message from the apostle Paul and others. Then, there was the Protestant Reformation of the late 15<sup>th</sup> and early 16<sup>th</sup> centuries that saw so many in Europe, through the grace of God, move out of their spiritual darkness under the Medieval Church to embrace God's mercy with genuine faith. The Great Awakening of the 18<sup>th</sup> century in England and America once again demonstrated the movement of God in people's hearts. Finally, the Jesus Movement of the late '60s and early '70s of the last century, when I became a believer, was a remarkable time of apparent change by a sector of American Society away from rebelling against God and in the direction of obedience to God.

However, I am suggesting that even the apparent reversals in the advancement of hostility to the Bible and truth at different times of human history have never slowed the pace of this advancement. The Bible is not saying that human beings become good people, who no longer experience any hatred of and rebellion against God when they become genuine believers. Instead, it teaches that people of authentic faith remain hostile to God as their basic moral condition, while their fundamental desire is to escape their own wickedness and be granted eternal mercy by God. Thus, the apostle Paul can cry out, "Who will rescue me from this body of death" (Romans 7:24) and be referring both to his initial realization of his moral corruption when he became a follower of Jesus as the Messiah as well as to his continual realization of his ongoing moral corruption as a follower of Jesus as the Messiah.

I think that this biblical evaluation of human beings of genuine faith was and is missing in most places where the Bible has been taught and discussed. All human beings feel a need to think well of themselves. Some are capable of doing so outside the context of any teaching from the Bible. Some, however, find it more convenient to think well of themselves after they have supposedly become Christians and believe that they are drawing upon the power of God to "walk in obedience to him."

If I am correct, that even authentic Christians remain hostile to God and truth while also having been miraculously changed by God to possess a fundamental desire to escape their hostility, then there has always been a forward movement in man's wickedness and evil in societies, even during times of spiritual reformation. Thus, we can say that, during the Great Awakening of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, even the Founding Fathers of America, who were drawing upon a biblical understanding of human beings, were attempting to arrest the evil of their day with such tools as the U.S. Constitution, while also contributing to the Constitution's eventual destruction as we are seeing today.

I assume that if anyone can recognize the decline in respect for the U.S. Constitution, it is the Gutenberg College community with its sound and reasonable approach to reading the Great Books of Western Civilization. With as much time and energy that the college's faculty, students, and alumni devote to understanding the original author's

intent of each text that they read, because they have become convinced that the only legitimate interpretation of a document is that which corresponds to the original author's meaning, the Gutenberg College community ought to be horrified at the American Society's and American Government's treatment of our Constitution. If we afford Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Locke, Hume, et al. the respect of understanding their writings according to what they intended to communicate, why would we support anyone in our government who claims that the U.S. Constitution is a "living document" whose interpretation changes with time and culture? To speak of the Constitution in this way is the language of demagogues and tyrants, because its logical conclusion is that there is no Constitution, thus resulting in the rule of whoever is ruling, not the rule of law. Of course, our support of politicians and government officials who play loose and fast with the Constitution would be to make ourselves liars with respect to the education that we offer at Gutenberg College and to sound like duplicitous fools. However, my point here still remains that even the Founding Fathers, because of their own moral depravity, contributed to the demise of their brilliant document.

All this to say that the Beast of American Society has existed as long as America has existed just as the Beasts of France, of England, of Spain, of Greenland, of Uruguay, etc. have also always existed from the beginnings of these countries. In addition, all of us have contributed in some way to the progress of the Beast of our American Society, because all of us are morally depraved human beings, regardless of our inward, spiritual condition. If we are authentic Christians, then our contribution to the Beast of American Society is in the midst of genuine belief. If we are not authentic Christians, then our contribution to this Beast is in the midst of continued abject rebellion against God.

## **THE BEAST OF AMERICAN GOVERNMENT**

The Founding Fathers of America were geniuses, and no group of leaders in American Government since has matched their grasp of the treacherous nature of human beings. Abraham Lincoln, as an individual, certainly was on a par intellectually and spiritually with the Founding Fathers, and I can only imagine how different America would be if he had not met such an untimely death thanks to John Wilkes Booth.

The structure of our government and its written foundation and instructions, the Constitution of the United States along with the Bill of Rights, is basically a miracle of human history, given the immoral condition of human beings. None of us should ever take for granted the rights and freedom that we have enjoyed in this country for over two hundred years. To conduct business and engage in exchanges of goods, services, and money with the freedom and velocity with which we have in this country is practically beyond belief. To have at our disposal such vast resources of energy, raw materials, land, and even human labor to pursue feeding, clothing, housing, and enjoying ourselves with recreation and entertainment would leave people in previous history breathless. To accumulate such tremendous wealth that has been spread among so many people in our country would make even the kings of the Ancient Near East dumfounded. That there has existed such a widespread and extensive middle class when most nations have known only the wealthy and the poor in their history is unprecedented. We owe a tremendous debt to the Founding Fathers for their wisdom in providing us with such potential *for and by limiting the power of government.*

Indeed, this is the very point. The Founding Fathers saw fit to provide us with a government, while also, as deftly as possible, limiting the power of our government. Why? Because they had a clear grasp of the nature of man, that we are all incurably devoted to evil that can best be expressed when we have as much power as possible

over other people. Take, for example, rape. What is rape? It is exercising power over another person without her consent, and it is not difficult for us to feel the nausea of the injustice when rape occurs, especially when it happens to someone close to us. Rape is a violent and obvious demonstration of the morally despicable, degenerate, repulsive, and perverted nature of human beings. It is one of the grossest examples of power being exercised over another human being without the person's consent. Notice, also, that rape involves invading another person's body by a man's entering into her personal space that we all would agree is only hers to grant entrance.

But the same is true of murder. When the sword of an attacker penetrates another human being's abdomen, when the bullet of an assailant burrows deep into another human being's heart, or when the flying projectiles of a bomb turn a human being's body into thousands of pieces of disconnected flesh, one person has invaded the private space of another person and exercised power over him without his permission, and we feel the injustice of such an intrusive act.

Stealing is no different. When a thief invades the personal space of one's home and escapes with a valuable item that rightly belongs only to you, what is the thief doing, but exercising power over another person without his consent. And why do rape, murder, and stealing occur? Because human beings are incurably morally depraved and degenerate to the extent that Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, "If you hate your brother, you are guilty of murder; if you desire with evil intent another man's wife, you are guilty of adultery" (cf. Matthew 5:21-28). In addition, the rest of the Bible assures us that, if we long with evil intent to have something that belongs to another person, we are guilty of stealing. In other words, we are all rapists, murderers, and thieves. We are all Beasts.

If I grasp to any reasonable degree just how Beast-like I am, why would I want to grant me a position in government to exercise power and authority over me? And if I grasp to any reasonable degree just how Beast-like is every other human being, why would I want to grant anyone else a position in government to exercise power and authority over me and others? It is true that governments are not only necessary, but also sanctioned and commissioned by God. After the flood and Noah and his family had survived it successfully, God stated in Genesis 9:6, "Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God he made man." Even though God had destroyed most of mankind with the flood, i.e., mankind whose every intent of the thoughts in their hearts was only evil all day long, he knew that Noah's descendants, who would populate history for the remaining time of the existence of the present realm, would be no different from mankind before the flood. Therefore, instead of God's bringing about more floods periodically to exercise justice in the present realm, he assigned the responsibility of social justice to the very beings who all deserve his eternal condemnation. And I suspect he knew that at times it would get ugly when morally depraved and evil human beings would grasp for more power than they should and would exercise this power in very horrible ways.

Yet, man's propensity to abuse power within government did not stop the apostle Paul from encouraging obedience to government as God's instrument of human justice in the present realm. Indeed, Paul even said that the members of government are "servants of God" to whom "tax" and "custom" and "fear" and "honor" are due (cf. Romans 13:1-7).

Nevertheless, the Founding Fathers of America realized that there was only a certain amount of government that was necessary and that government officials are morally depraved and despicable human beings like everyone else. So again, if I grasp the biblical concept of the inherent and incurable evil in all human beings, why would I want to continue to grant more and more authority and power to Beasts like me who govern

me and my fellow citizens? Why would I believe for a moment that those in government have my best interests at heart and will always work to make life better and more enjoyable for me and everyone else? Why would I even applaud those in government who want to take more money from the wealthy and distribute it to the poor? Ah. Now, we may have found a good reason to grant more power to the government, because it has been true down through history that the wealthy use their money as an instrument of power and oppression over others so as to exploit them and keep them in poverty.

I remember reading Hard Times by Charles Dickens and being struck by his description of the horrible conditions in early industrial England for the workers in the wealthy capitalists' factories. It is a very disturbing book and one that could easily be used by socialists to argue against capitalism. The hue and cry of our day is, "Look at what the rich have done. They have accumulated their wealth while there are so many people stuck in poverty all over our world. The only solution is to take the money from the rich and distribute it to the poor."

I admit that allowing morally depraved human beings to accumulate wealth through capitalistic business ventures is risky and dangerous. As in early industrial England, there is the strong possibility that the rich will selfishly mistreat others and imprison them in poverty. However, are we so naïve as to think that morally depraved human beings *in government* will not do exactly the same thing—accumulate wealth through excessive taxes and selfishly mistreat others, even the poor, by imprisoning them in poverty in order to justify their foolish policies and to justify the accumulation of greater and greater power that is sanctioned by the voting populace who are deceived by their propaganda? Of course we are so naïve—because we are as morally depraved as those in government. They are Beasts, and we are Beasts. They are hostile to God and the Bible, and we are hostile to God and the Bible. And the combination of the two groups within our democratic republic makes for disastrous results in all our lives. Those in government, by thinking better of themselves than they should, depart more and more from what it means to be authentic, biblical human beings, and those outside government as regular citizens, by thinking more highly of themselves and their government officials than they should, also depart more and more from what it means to be authentic, biblical human beings.

In other words, an authentic, biblical human being grasps his own evil and is both repulsed by it and fearful of it. He understands his propensity to treat people in a wicked, oppressive, and harmful way. And the last thing that he wants is either to be granted the power and authority that potentially could result in his perpetrating evil toward people or to grant other morally despicable and perverted human beings the authority and power that potentially could result in their perpetrating evil toward him and other people. The authentic, biblical human being wants to reduce the risk to a bare minimum of his invading another human being's private space and exercising authority over him without the other person's consent. And he also wants to reduce the risk to a bare minimum of any other corrupt and degenerate human being's having the same opportunity over him and others.

In addition, he is fully aware of the fact that government, not business, is the most dangerous location for human beings to exercise unwanted power and authority over other human beings. In other words, it is certainly unsafe for a morally corrupt human being to acquire vast quantities of wealth in business as a capitalist so that his money becomes a veritable tool of oppression and pain toward other people, even giving him the ability to hire gunmen who carry out his will. It is even riskier and more dangerous for a morally depraved human being to acquire vast quantities of power and authority in government along with the right to invade other people's bank accounts and steal their money through excessive taxation and then build an army with tanks, cannons, and

machine guns that can be used to force citizens to comply with his selfish demands. It is bad enough to be oppressed by wealth and thugs at the hands of those in business. It is even worse to be oppressed by the wealth, legislative power, and an army (not to mention F-18s, AH-64 Apache helicopter gunships, and drones) of those in government. And if we think that we are in a vastly different situation from the American colonies who were subjected to the tyranny and oppression of what was basically a foreign government so that it is completely unnecessary for us to own guns privately, because we have an army to protect us from foreign oppression, and that our government will never become like England and tyrannically oppress us, we do not understand the biblical teaching on the immoral condition of all human beings, including ourselves. Each inherently evil human being should be prepared to defend himself against all other inherently evil human beings.

Therefore, I suggest that, if we truly understand the universal, immoral human condition, then granting more power and authority to morally corrupt human beings in government, especially as they sweet-talk us into voting for them by promising us a more enjoyable and happier life, whether through a kinder, gentler nation or through hope and change, ought to be the very definition of insanity. As P.J. O'Rourke said, "Giving money and power to government is like giving whiskey and car keys to teenage boys." If it is utter foolishness to give whiskey and car keys to teenage boys, then how much more foolish are we for giving money and power to morally depraved human beings who purportedly rule over us for our benefit. If American Society is a Beast, then the American Government, that chafes at the restrictions of our Constitution, an ingenious document that was written in order to place restrictions on government officials, is also a Beast. This is the same Beast that grows no matter whether Republicans or Democrats are in office. And we all have contributed to the Beastliness of both American Society and its partner in crime, the American Government.

## **THE BEAST OF THE AMERICAN CHURCH**

One would think that the greatest refuge from the Beasts of American Society and American Government would be the American Church, that calls itself Christian, teaches from the Bible, upholds the name of Jesus as Lord and Savior, encourages obedience to God by promoting biblical moral concepts such as marital fidelity, honesty, love, and charity, while also giving people an opportunity to meet consistently for mutual support in their faith, and while constantly engaging in activities of outreach and goodwill toward others. However, the American Church may be the most horrible Beast of all.

American Society and American Government are becoming increasingly bolder and, yet, more honest about their hostility to God, the Bible, and Christianity. In addition, in the midst of their honesty is also their use of deceptive propaganda to further their goals. By means of the mass media that has decided that socialism is the solution to America's problems, American Society and American Government are able to offer a plethora of facts with plenty of innuendo to encourage people to trust the government for its explanation of reality and comply with its instructions on how to live life. Of course, it is bad enough when people use propaganda while honestly expressing their disapproval of Christianity. It is even worse when people use propaganda while dishonestly expressing their approval of Christianity. In other words, I suggest that the American Church is perhaps the most highly propagandized group in America. In order to clarify this point, I need to spend a few moments explaining my definition of propaganda.

In his paper, Jack discusses and defines propaganda's relationship to the irrational religious commitment to certain so-called biblical doctrines within the Christian

community and to certain political doctrines within American Society. Those of you who have read Jacques Ellul's book Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes will recognize that Jack is drawing upon the ideas from this book. I am also. Let me list five characteristics of propaganda that Ellul discusses in his book and that will help us understand how the American Church is guilty of making these deceptive characteristics part of their *modus operandi*.

First, there is Orthopraxy—literally, straight doing. While the American Church claims that its goal is to educate people from the Bible so that they can think rightly about God's truth, I suggest that their real goal is to educate people from only a pretense of teaching the Bible so that they do the right thing—not the right thing as the Bible defines the right thing, but the right thing as the Church leadership defines it, and the two are radically different from one another. In other words, all the apparent biblical education that goes on within the American Church is intended to motivate people to support the institution of the Church, not to follow Jesus as Lord and Savior. The ultimate goal of the American Church is to put food on the tables of pastors and roofs over their families' heads, to attract people to their weekly entertainment shows on Sunday mornings so that they participate enthusiastically in a religious ceremony that uses biblical terminology that, in turn, permits both the leadership and the people to state proudly and publicly how many people attend their Church, and to engage in activities that give the appearance of being loving and charitable toward others, even to the far reaches of the globe. The ultimate goal of the American Church is not to teach people solid, biblical truth so that they can face into and endure suffering, pain, and persecution as tests of their faith. The ultimate goal of the American Church is to manipulate people into making each Church organization a successful business. While it is humanly impossible for Christians to perpetuate their own faith, so that it hangs only by the thread of God's grace, the American Church ignores this reality and seeks to motivate people simply to act in support of the Church, all the while deceiving people into thinking that faith is as easy as falling off a log and that they are following Jesus simply by participating in the nice, comfortable, religious environment that it provides them. Consequently, the American Church is a Beast and perhaps the greatest bastion of propaganda in America.

Second, from Ellul's book, propaganda plays off the prevailing notion within humanity that people are basically good. In contrast, the Bible is filled with statements to the effect that people are wicked, evil, depraved, and corrupt, and they need salvation from God's eternal condemnation through the saving work of Jesus Christ on the cross and his intervention on their behalf at the final judgment. Fortunately, at least the conservative branch of the American Church would never suggest that man is naturally good. However, because people cannot stomach the notion of their ongoing morally despicable nature as Christians, even the conservative Church has had to invent a teaching from the Bible that the purpose of Christianity in people's lives in the present realm is to give them the power and ability to "live the victorious Christian life" and to be good people, especially in the midst of all the non-Christians around them who are bad people. Thus, Christians are deceived by the propaganda of their leadership into thinking more highly of themselves than they should. By ignoring the biblical message that no one ever escapes his moral depravity this side of eternity, the American Church is a Beast and deceives people about their ongoing, moral corruption.

Third, Ellul argues that propaganda can most easily be employed where there is the "massification" of individuals and where this massification is the most intense. The propagandist must be careful to convince all the recipients of his message that they are most valuable as individuals while also subjecting them to the subtle and not so subtle forces of the group that rob them of their individuality. In addition, constant pressure to raise this massification to a feverish pitch and hold it there will ensure its success. The

American Church has been a master at both of these aspects of propaganda. On the one hand, for example, Church leadership has invented another useful teaching from the Bible whereby they encourage people to pursue spiritual disciplines of such practices as prayer, fasting, Bible study, and giving—all *individual* actions. On the other hand, individuals are made to feel that they are not good Christians if they are not all performing these spiritual disciplines while participating in the institution of the Church. The social pressure to conform to the masses of Christians who are all doing the same spiritual disciplines, especially within the same Church organization, while also dressing the same way, using the same terminology, and going on the same missions trips turns the American Church into a Beast, robbing people of their individuality in the name of Christ and making them subjects of insidious propaganda.

Fourth, Ellul tells us that propaganda works because people have an insatiable need for help in facing the uncertainties of human existence and for help in assuaging their fears that arise because of life's uncertainties. What greater assistance can a person receive in this regard but the message of the Bible that describes God's project. God will eventually create an eternal Kingdom with Jesus as our King and also as our High Priest, who advocates on our behalf at the final judgment, in order to ensure that we receive God's eternal mercy and forgiveness. Indeed, the American Church alludes to this wonderful message and encourages people to embrace God's salvation through Jesus Christ. However, as Soren Kierkegaard points out in his book *Practice in Christianity*, eventually every Church must change its message if it, as an institution, is going to survive. In other words, every Church typically begins well as an organic community of believers who are enthusiastic about learning the Bible's truth of eternal hope. However, every Church soon morphs into a well-oiled machine that is more concerned about its name, its reputation, its numerical success in both people and money, and its attractiveness to people through the aesthetics of its building, its leaders, its music, and its programs. Kierkegaard says that a Church begins by addressing people's fears with ideas that more often than not closely represent the biblical message. However, sooner or later the Church changes its message and improperly addresses people's fears by massifying them into a propagandized, religious community. The Church appears to wrap its comforting arms around its people who fear life's uncertainties. In addition, it extols the importance of everyone's being a member of its community by participating in the various opportunities for fellowship that it offers. Thus, the Church subtly pressures people to hand over their individuality to the institution and comply with all its intellectual, spiritual, moral, psychological, and even physical demands—all under the pretense of being shepherded as the body of Christ. When a Church arrives at this place, Kierkegaard says that it has become an "established order," that cannot tolerate criticism or dissent from any individual, even if he is right. To the individual who dares to speak up against the established order, the Church strongly says, "Shut up." Thus, by squashing free and open pursuit of studying the Bible for the sake of preserving established, religious institutions, the American Church has become a Beast.

Fifth, and this will be my last point from Ellul's book, he explains vertical and horizontal propaganda. In the midst of all their fears and insecurities, people cry out for a strong leader whom they can trust and follow, who will answer their most troubling questions about life and allay their deepest fears, while also providing them with the father or mother whom they never fully had as a child, because none of us has been brought up by morally perfect parents who loved us adequately (this last part is my addition to Ellul's explanation). This need by people for a father-like leader also makes them vulnerable to manipulation and, therefore, to vertical propaganda. The leader acts from a position of superior authority, seeking to influence the crowd below him. In this situation, the propagandee is depersonalized by the leader so that his decisions are no

longer his but are imposed by a conditioned reflex. Thus, the leader is able to isolate each individual following him even though the propagandee is part of a crowd.

However, to ensure that his followers do not detect their isolation, the leader provides opportunities for discussion. In addition, these discussion groups deceive everyone into believing that their leader is not strong-arming his followers. The advertised goal is for everyone to contribute to the ideas of the group, while the group, with its own discussion leader who is hand-picked by the supreme leader, shapes the dialogue and ensures that all the participants discover the “correct” line of reasoning. Everyone feels as though he is an equal in the group, but, in actuality, everyone becomes trapped in the dialogue and succumbs to the propaganda subtly forced upon them from the leadership above. In order to be accepted by the father-leader, the individuals must conform their thinking and actions to those sanctioned by the leader or risk being ostracized, which is too frightening even to contemplate.

Fortunately for the American Church, there is an abundance of men and women who would love to father and mother others as part of their own response to being inadequately parented as children. The result is vertical propaganda, whereby the pastors, ministers, and priests act from a superior and ultimately illegitimate position of authority and seek to influence the crowd below. The pastor’s, minister’s, or priest’s authority and trustworthiness seem all the more real and genuine if he has received a degree from a reputable Christian seminary, ordination from a reputable Christian denomination, is handsome or beautiful in appearance, and is a gifted orator.

In addition, these kind father-figures establish Bible studies and train their leaders to enhance the communal Christian fellowship of the Church’s members. These members willingly open their Bibles and follow the orthodox traditional teaching of their leaders, while every so often contributing to the lively and thoughtful discussion that provides assurance and comfort to everyone that they know the truth. Certainly, there is the appearance of freely and openly entertaining questions regarding the Church’s and the Bible Study’s interpretation of a passage, but the discussion on such a topic never lasts so long as to allow authentic contemplation and reasoning, because never must the sheep be allowed to become unsettled, or it could ruin their faith. However, their faith is not in the Bible, but in their non-apostolic leaders and their religious institutions that have been following human tradition for perhaps a thousand or more years. And yet, these sheep, in the midst of their profound need for a strong leader other than God alone, are led to believe that they not only know the truth but also are securely grouped together as those who will enter into eternal life. As Kierkegaard says in Practice in Christianity, the Church assures them that, by their allegiance to the Church with its orthodoxy, tradition, and community, they will be handed over by the Church to God when their time comes to leave the present realm and enter into heaven. Indeed, the final touch on this charade will be a memorial service, where the pastor will comfort and console those left behind by the deceased that he is now in heaven because of his faith in the Jesus of the Church. And this is the point. The pastor’s Jesus is the Jesus of the Church, because no one has been allowed to think that the Church’s Jesus is, perhaps, not the Bible’s Jesus.

When the biblical Jesus confronted the Pharisees in Matthew 23, I believe that he was addressing their having chosen to be the prime propagandists of his day within the Jewish culture. He described them as having seated themselves in the chair of Moses, having tied heavy burdens to men’s shoulders which they themselves were unwilling to help move, performing their leadership functions in order to be noticed by men, and loving the respect that they received by being called “Rabbi.” Jesus also said that they cleaned the outside of the cup, but were full of robbery and selfishness. They were like whitewashed tombs—clean on the outside but full of dead men’s bones, because they appeared outwardly good while being inwardly evil.

Would not Jesus say the same thing today to the popes, priests, ministers, bishops, pastors, elders and other leaders of the institutions of the Church, that, in some cases, have been in existence for almost 1900 years? The apostolic authors of the New Testament should be the only authorities in our lives and not anyone else, no matter how bright, learned, educated, or respected in Church history, and no matter how apparently significant was the Council or conference that they led. In contrast, if we look closely at how popes, priests, ministers, bishops, pastors, elders, and other Church leaders have and do behave, they have seated themselves in the chairs of the apostles. They presume that, by holding to so-called traditional orthodoxy, they are accurate in their understanding of the Bible, as accurate as the apostles. By writing doctrinal statements and parading them before their Churches, they presume to have transferred accurately the biblical message into another authoritative document to which they always refer, even implicitly, when they study and teach the Bible. Thus, their doctrinal statements become their Bible, and not the Bible itself.

In addition, would not Jesus say to these popes, priests, ministers, bishops, pastors, elders, and other leaders what he went on to say to the Pharisees of his day, "Go to hell?" Just because the American Church's leaders promote the Bible as their authoritative text and promote the name of Jesus as that which only saves from God's condemnation does not mean that they genuinely believe it, especially when they invent spurious teachings from the Bible, regard tradition as authoritative as the Bible, and pressure individuals to hand over their minds to them and condone only their sanctioned religious actions.

The American Church is a Beast, and everyone who supports the American Church thoughtlessly, unconditionally, and unwaveringly is a Beast, not just because we all are Beasts by virtue of our own individual moral depravity, but because we are turning a blind eye to those who give the appearance of supporting the Bible. We may think, perhaps, that we are justified in doing so because there is so much explicit hostility in our society and government to Christianity. In addition, we may be afraid—afraid of being rejected by the American Church, even if it is a Beast. This reluctance on our part to stand up for the sole, apostolic authority of the Bible shows just how powerful and intimidating is the Church's propaganda and how Beast-like and morally despicable we are as individuals.

Without going into much detail in this paper, my contention is that the authorized roles of pastors/bishops, elders, and deacons mentioned in the New Testament ended with the death of the last apostle (probably John). It made sense for pastors and elders, along with other Christian leaders, to exercise the level of authority that they did during the writing of the New Testament, because the apostles were still alive and available to answer questions and provide counsel and advice *directly*. However, once the last living apostle passed away, the only source of authoritative truth that continued to exist was the documents that the apostolic authors had written. If it is not obvious to you how difficult it is to base your understanding of reality on a written document, even a recent one in your mother tongue, grab an article on Twitter that purports to be an accurate description of American culture and try to understand exactly what the author is saying, especially by asking good and obvious questions such as, What does the author mean by the different words that he uses? My older son and I have done this several times in the last few weeks and have come to realize that, without direct access to the author, it is extremely difficult to become 100% certain of what he is intending to communicate—even if you live in the culture of the author and speak his language.

Now, imagine that you are a morally depraved sinner who is living around 100 A.D. and who may even have had some direct contact with the apostles, who were the only authoritative and completely accurate proclaimers of the biblical message as

commissioned by Jesus (cf. The Upper Room Discourse of John 13-17). In addition, you realize that you are not and never will be an authoritative and accurate spokesman of the biblical message, so that you do not presume that people should follow you in your understanding of the Bible but should always look to only the biblical authors for an understanding of truth. What does this make you within the Christian community? It does not make you an authoritative pope, priest, minister, bishop, pastor, or elder. It makes you merely a discussion leader, who will never completely understand the Bible correctly. Indeed, everyone since the apostles within the Christian community is merely a discussion leader, there to help others *think as individuals* and *come to their own conclusions about the content of the biblical message*.

However, because the early Christians were Beasts like you and me, they forged institutions within which they grabbed for power in order to propagandize others and pressure them to comply with *their* interpretations of the Bible or face rejection by their so-called Christian Churches. As Richard Rubenstein points out in his book When Jesus Became God: The Struggle to Define Christianity During the Last Days of Rome, it eventually got to the point where the pressure to comply increased by burning down church buildings, murdering dissenters in the street, and burning at the stake those who strayed from traditional orthodoxy. Such behavior, for example, was part and parcel of the tactics used by the authors and supporters of the Nicene Creed in 325 A.D. In spite of this behavior by the formulators of trinitarian doctrines, the Senior Minister of a large church in Texas once said to me, "We hold to the Nicene Creed because we believe that the Holy Spirit was guiding the men of the Council of Nicaea." Are we insane? Yes, we are insane, each and every one of us to the degree that we are morally corrupt and evil according to the Bible. We are all Beasts, who would rather surrender our minds to the vertical propaganda of the Beast of the American Church and fearfully support the horizontal propaganda of this Beast by condoning its use of non-apostolic documents to keep its adoring crowds in line, instead of being willing to rely solely upon the Bible and our individual wrestling with its texts in dialogue with our fellow discussion leaders.

## THE BEAST OF EACH EXISTING INDIVIDUAL HUMAN BEING

In the section on the Beast of Revelation, I cited Romans 1 and the apostle Paul's description of the human moral condition along with Genesis 6 and God's comments on the subject. The Bible teaches that all mankind is incurably evil and hostile to God and his truth. I then drew upon the Bible's description of man's immorality and used it to explain that each and every one of us inevitably contributes to the Beast-like characteristics of American Society, American Government, and the American Church. We are constantly injecting evil into every situation that we experience, even right now as each of us exists wherever God is currently causing us to do so.

Again, Soren Kierkegaard has helped me understand this biblical concept. In his book Concluding Unscientific Postscript to *Philosophical Fragments*, he often uses the phrases "existing individual" and "existing individual human being."<sup>3</sup> His point is to emphasize that, unlike many Christians' view, God is constantly causing each one of us to exist exactly as we are right now. God does not, as many Christians think, create us and then turn us loose to live our lives independently of him. Instead, Kierkegaard says

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<sup>3</sup> For example, Kierkegaard writes, "No wonder, then, that one even admires the observer [of the world] when he is noble, heroic, or, perhaps more correctly, absent-minded enough to forget that he, too, is a human being, an existing individual human being!" [Concluding Unscientific Postscript to *Philosophical Fragments*, Soren Kierkegaard, Volume 1, edited and translated by Howard Hong and Edna Hong, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1992, pg. 159]

that it is theologically impossible for God to make things, even human beings, without continually causing them to exist at every moment, which includes his always causing every aspect of their existence, even all human choices. Thus, Kierkegaard's philosophy is pure *Existentialism*, i.e., Theological Existentialism whereby God brings each stuff of the creation into existence and causes it to exist at every moment.

I believe that Kierkegaard's view matches the Bible's, that it is theologically impossible for anything apart from God to exist on its own. Therefore, the Bible is saying that, ultimately, it is God who is causing not only our beingness, but also our choices and even our moral depravity, as well as our faith, if we are authentic Christians. The Bible also teaches that our moral depravity sticks with us throughout our entire lives, regardless of our spiritual condition as either authentic Christians or non-believers. Therefore, God is continuously causing us to contaminate our circumstances with evil every step of the way as we live on this earth. Oh joy! This means that we are all responsible, to a degree, for the Beasts of American Society and American Government. In addition, if we have participated or do participate in the American Church, we have also contributed to its Beastliness.

We can conclude, then, that there is not much more to say about the Beast of Each Existing Individual Human Being. However, I did mention in my Introduction that, as individuals, we can demonstrate our Beastliness in two basic ways. One is through a commitment to oppose God and his truth through either –

1. Abject and moral rebellion toward God, or
2. Relatively good appearing and secular citizenship within America, or
3. Relatively good appearing and religious citizenship within America.

Jack covered this first way in his discussion of –

- a. The Superior Class
- b. Contrabiblicism
- c. Propaganda
- d. Leftism
- e. Reactions from the Pseudo-Right
- f. Understanding the Power of the Beast

Therefore, I refer you to these sections of his paper for a detailed explanation of the first way that individual human beings demonstrate Beast-like characteristics. The other way that we can demonstrate our Beastliness is in the midst of having been inwardly and miraculously changed by God so that we are fundamentally committed to God and his truth. This second way pertains to authentic Christians who continue to be Beasts of true faith. When God miraculously changes our hearts and we actually embrace biblical truth with a genuine desire for God's mercy and salvation, we do not become good people who have shed our moral depravity and corruption. We simply become morally despicable Christians. Yes, we now have as the ultimate desire and goal of our lives to escape God's condemnation and to receive his eternal mercy. However, we do so with evil and wickedness still residing in and infesting the fabric of our beings. Therefore, as Christians, we are just as much to blame as non-Christians for injecting evil and hostility to God and truth into American Society, American Government, and the American Church. However, I think that it is possible to mitigate the influence of our Beastliness in each of these three contexts, something that I will discuss in a moment.

Before I do, I would like us to consider Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and the tax-collector in Luke 18:9-14. Luke comments that Jesus told this parable to some people

who trusted in themselves that they were good and viewed others with contempt. I suggest that we all do this, even and sometimes especially after we become Christians. We are Beasts who self-righteously need to feel as though we are always right. Therefore, it is easy to look at others the way that the Pharisee does in the parable, especially at those who obviously demonstrate their evil through their overt actions of adultery, lying, deception, etc., and say, “God, I thank you that I am not like so-and-so, who is clearly an evil person, either by not having faith in Jesus as his Lord and Savior, or by not being enlightened like me who supports our socialistic government that will obviously care for people and promote the common good rather than succumbing to the evils of capitalism. Instead, God, let me list all the wonderful moral things that I do—I go to Church, I study the Bible, I pray and fast with the best of those who perform the spiritual disciplines. I vote for people who really care about others by making sure that the selfish rich get taxed even more. I applaud those who will finally make life fair in this country. I am an enlightened biblical person.”

Before my socialist readers object and think that I am being unfair to them, it is just as easy to look at others the way the Pharisee does in the parable and say, “God, I thank you that I am not a socialist, who is clearly an evil person by not being enlightened like me who supports capitalism and individual, human freedom. God, let me list all the wonderful moral things that I do—I go to Church, I study the Bible, I pray and fast with the best of those who perform the spiritual disciplines. I vote for people who really care about the Founding Fathers’ initial intent for America and for limiting government and taxes. I am an enlightened biblical person.”

In other words, any perspective on myself and others that does not immediately and consistently take into account my own moral corruption and, therefore, the fact that I am just like all those other people, whether socialists or capitalists, makes me a Pharisee and demonstrates that I am a Beast. Consider, instead, the tax-collector in the parable. He was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven while beating his breast and saying, “God be merciful to me, the sinner.” Notice there was nothing in his prayer about the spiritual disciplines of fasting and prayer, about the institution of the Church, about the trinity, about orthodoxy, about pursuing the common good, etc. He simply used a short, honest “I” statement. “God, I am a sinner and need your mercy”—done, over, the end. Jesus goes on to comment about the tax-collector, “This man went back to his home forgiven by God.” In other words, this man got it. He knew who he was—a Beast. And his belief in God and appeal to God for mercy did not change this. Indeed, it only substantiated it. I suggest that our conclusion from this parable ought to be that everyone of us is a Beast, who maintains this status through his Existing as an Individual Human Being in this temporary realm, so that everything that even we Christians touch and participate in becomes contaminated by our Beast-like characteristics—whether American Society, American Government, the American Church, or any other group or endeavor.

## **HOW SHOULD WE LIVE?**

So many Beasts; so little time—fortunately. Jack has provided a good, biblical explanation in Part Two of his paper on how to follow Jesus when you cannot kill any of the Beasts that he discussed in his paper and that I have discussed in my paper. Therefore, I can be particularly brief here. In six words, flee from the wrath to come.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Matthew 3:7, “But when [Jesus] saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, ‘You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?’”

I believe that the Bible teaches that the task of a human being is to prepare himself for the judgment. God has said that each of us will *individually* stand before him at the final assessment of our earthly, human existence, and the result will be one of two possibilities. Either Jesus will stand shoulder to shoulder with us and successfully mediate on our behalf for God's eternal mercy, or Jesus will remain seated at the right hand of God, leaving us on our own to defend unsuccessfully our hostility to God during this earthly existence. The first possibility will lead to our being welcomed into the eternal Kingdom of God where Jesus as King will rule over us. The second possibility will lead to our being destroyed eternally by God.<sup>5</sup>

We can imagine the various defenses that human beings will employ in hopes of assuaging God's wrath. "But God, I cast out demons in the name of Jesus, I performed miracles in the name of Jesus, I pastored churches in the name of Jesus, I taught Bible studies in the name of Jesus, I worshiped you in Church every Sunday in the name of Jesus, I promoted capitalism and individual freedom in the name of Jesus, I promoted socialism and redistribution of wealth in the name of Jesus, I worked for the common good in the name of Jesus, etc., etc., etc." And God will say, "Depart from me, you who practiced lawlessness."<sup>6</sup>

Certainly, God calls us to love and be merciful to our fellow man. However, I suggest that the greatest love and mercy that we can show toward mankind is our individual, humble repentance like the tax-collector in the temple. I realize that this action does nothing to feed or clothe people, or to extricate them from their financial poverty. It does nothing to stop invasions from foreign armies or attacks from terrorists. All it does is humbly and accurately present a simple truth—that each of us individually needs God's eternal mercy or we are toast. I suggest that the self-focused, humble tax-collector did more through his simple prayer in the temple and away from the public eye to mitigate the evil contamination that he was continuously bringing to his surroundings than all the sacrifices that the Pharisee offered to God at the temple and all the public, religious activities in which he engaged.

Nevertheless, I was reminded two weekends ago of God's ultimate control over the effect that people have for good or evil in this world through both their private and public lives. In other words, we cannot say for sure exactly when and where God has worked or is going to work in people's hearts and minds. I was writing this paper at home on a Saturday morning when my wife called me on her way to work and told me that there were two fire engines parked across a street from each other next to our local high school a block away. Their tall ladders extended upwards toward one another, and a huge American flag hung high in the air between them. I walked over and asked a group of photographers from the press what was the occasion. They told me that one of the 19 Hot Shots who had died in the Yarnell Hill fire last month in Arizona had attended Newport Harbor High School (where my wife and two sons had gone to high school), and they were waiting for a procession of fire engines from southern California who would pass under the American flag on their way to a memorial service at St. Andrews Presbyterian Church just across the street from the high school. I rushed home, put on some more formal clothes, and walked back to watch fire engines from as far away as Los Angeles County drive slowly down Irvine Avenue with their lights flashing and under the suspended American flag to the music of the Orange County Fire Authority bagpipes and drum corps playing America the Beautiful. At the front of the fire engines was the Granite Mountain Hot Shots personnel truck that would have carried the young men to and from their assignments. It was empty except for the driver. Needless to say, all of us

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<sup>5</sup> cf. John 5 and my explanation of this passage in my book God's Project: Through the Window of John 5

<sup>6</sup> cf. Matthew 7:13-27

silently and somberly stood and watched. And we were moved beyond words. I also have to say that what made it particularly moving for me is that my older son has just been hired by Oxnard Fire Department in southern California.

The bagpipes and the visiting firemen led us into the building, and I sat and listened to the minister from St. Andrews Presbyterian Church greet and welcome everyone, while also presenting the message of Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. I listened to Grant McKee's father talk about his 21-year-old son's love for wrestling on the team at Newport Harbor High School and for the outdoors and his job. I listened to Robert Caldwell's sister talk about her 23-year-old brother's love for the outdoors and his job. Robert Caldwell grew up in Prescott, Arizona and was Grant McKee's cousin. In other words, we were there to honor two of the Hot Shots, two young men who, as cousins, were like brothers to one another and who both died in that catastrophic heat along with 17 others. My neighbor down the street was in Yarnell, Arizona as the fire was cresting the hill just outside of town, and, in her words, she got the hell out of there as fast as she could. She fled from the fire while these brave young men walked toward it.

As I sat there during the memorial service, I was struck by everyone's humility in the face of such a powerful force—fire. In this paper, I hope that I have not said or implied that I know the spiritual condition of anyone else's heart. I barely know my own. I know the *moral* condition of every human being because of what the Bible teaches, but I do not know anyone's *spiritual* condition, i.e., whether or not someone is a miraculously and inwardly changed person. I am going to leave it up to God at the judgment to sort out who is and who is not an authentically repentant human being. Nevertheless, I was impressed during the service with how tragedy not only causes grief and anguish, but it also can motivate the "established order" of the Church to drop its Beastly guard and try to comfort people and give them eternal hope—another temporary mitigation of the progressive march of evil within American Society, American Government, and the American Church.

Indeed, there will be nothing that stops God from completing his project of bringing about both the temporary Kingdom of Israel before the end of the present realm and the eternal Kingdom of God after the end of the present realm. God will lovingly, graciously, and unfailingly call out a people for himself from among the Jews and the gentiles to survive the final judgment. This is our only hope in this temporary existence and the only good accomplishment that we can count on as Existing Individual Human Beings.

Therefore, restating my point in this section, the *ultimate* task of a human being is not to make sure that the world is a better place when he dies, that life is more fair for everyone when he dies, that people are better fed, clothed, housed, and educated when he dies, that either capitalism or socialism is squashed by the time he dies, that traditional orthodoxy is better protected and more secure when he dies, that the Bible is more respected by our culture or global humanity when he dies, or that his Church still exists and people are continuing to be evangelized around the world because of the Church's efforts when he dies. The ultimate task of a human being is to prepare himself for the judgment. What does it profit a man to gain the whole world—politically, economically, socially, financially, religiously—and lose his own existence by being destroyed after the judgment? For the Son of God, Jesus of Nazareth, is going to come to the final judgment in the glory of God the Father and will repay every man according to his actions. If a man has acted on the basis of an honest and accurate evaluation of his own moral corruption and evil, he will be saved from God's condemnation, enter into the eternal Kingdom of God, and be transformed into a morally perfect person—a Beast

no more. If a man has acted solely on the basis of his moral corruption and depravity, he will be condemned and destroyed by God—a Beast no more.<sup>7</sup>

*Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound,  
That saved a wretch like me.  
I once was lost but now am found;  
Was blind, but now I see.*

*'Twas Grace that taught my heart to fear,  
And Grace my fears relieved.  
How precious did that Grace appear,  
The hour I first believed.*

*The Lord has promised good to me.  
His word my hope secures.  
He will my hope and portion be,  
As long as life endures.*

*Through many dangers, toils, and snares  
I have already come.  
'Tis Grace has brought me safe thus far,  
And Grace will lead me home.*

*When we've been there ten thousand years,  
Bright shining as the sun,  
We've no less days to sing God's praise,  
Than when we first begun.*

Now, you have need of perseverance, so that after you have done the will of God, you will receive the promise. For, yet, soon that which is coming will come and will not delay. But my just one will live by virtue of belief, and if he draws back, my soul is not pleased with him.

Hebrews 10:36-38; Habakkuk 2:3-4; Isaiah 26:20

ὅτι ἐξ θεοῦ καὶ δια θεοῦ καὶ εἰς θεον τὰ πάντα  
αὐτῷ ἢ δόξα εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας, ἀμήν  
[For from God and in view of God and for God are all things;  
to him be the glory into the ages. Amen.]  
Romans 11:36

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<sup>7</sup> cf. Matthew 16:24-28