

Romans 14:19
So then let us
follow after
things which
make for peace,
and things
whereby we may
edify one
another.



John 8:32 and
ye shall know
the truth, and
the truth shall
make you free.

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CHRIST DESIGNED THE WORK OF THE CHURCH (No. 3)

Jim Stauffer

The work of the church in benevolence is guided by the attitude Jesus taught His disciples to have toward those in need in the example of the Good Samaritan in **Luke 10:25-37** and the restrictions placed upon the collective activity of the saints as taught by the apostolic writers.

The attitude Jesus taught His disciples is explained by the content of **James 1:27** *Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.* It is the responsibility of Christ's disciples to, *do good unto all people, especially to those of the household of faith.* (**Gal. 6:10**)

This is a part of the stewardship of the Christian. The parable of the talents (**Mat. 25:14-30**) makes obvious the things we possess are given by the Master. As a result we are to use them as He has instructed to bring glory to His name. That is indeed the very reason we possess them.

An understanding of this principle has been used by most religious leaders to tell the church they are the same unit as the individual disciple and therefore the same instruction given to the individual is applicable to the church. Nothing could be farther from the truth and nothing could be a greater deviation from the principles taught to the church.

Let us look at a couple of examples. **Acts 11:27-30** tells us of a need that will occur during the reign of Claudius Caesar. There was to be a famine throughout the world as predicted by the prophet

Agabus. Now the brethren in Antioch had the where withal to send those things helpful to the **brethren** in Judea. It is important that we notice the object of their benevolence was the **brethren** in Judea. There were undoubtedly individuals who were not brethren in Judea who also were in need. The responsibility for the satisfaction of their need was not placed upon the church. A similar situation existed in **1 Cor. 16:1-4**. On this occasion Paul begins his instruction by saying, *Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also.* Again the purpose of the church in this situation was to take up a collection for the needy **saints** in Judea.

Now that we understand the aim of benevolence as a work of the church is limited to needy saints, let us turn to another area of violation of Scripture by those who seek to enlarge church benevolence to those outside the body of Christ. There are many churches who do not have the resources to support those beyond the parameters of the local church. Yet in their desire to participate in this unlawful work, they send their money to larger churches to support a work they (the larger church) has undertaken. What this does in addition to being an unlawful work of the church is to place their funds under the oversight of another eldership beside their own.

Both **Acts 20:28** and **1 Pet. 5:1,2** teach clearly the eldership of a local congregation is responsible for the flock which is among them. This situation then leads the elders in one congregation to relinquish

their oversight of that church's work while at the same time allowing the eldership of the larger church to take the oversight of work that is not from the flock among them. Both elderships in this matter have failed in the charge given to them by the Lord.

As we have said so many times it behooves us to hear what the Lord revealed to us by way of the Holy Spirit, **2 John 9** *Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son.*

Batman vs. Jesus

Our culture seems to be obsessed with superheroes. There's Batman and Batwoman, Superman and Supergirl, Spiderman, Ironman, the Hulk, Wonder Woman, Captain America, Thor, McClister Man, The Green Lantern, the Flash, the Atom, and others. Northstar is a gay superhero. The new Spiderman is multiracial. The Black Panther and the Falcon are black superheroes. And these are just the ones based on comic books. In the movies and on TV we get Hancock, Flash Gordon, Robocop, Darkman, the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, the Rocketeer, the Phantom, the Power Rangers, etc. And who can forget the cartoon superheroes like Underdog, Mighty Mouse, and Darkwing Duck? There have been 10 or 11 Batman movies, about 6 Spiderman films, and several combined superhero films ("The Avengers"). They have made *millions* of dollars. In a related category are all the Star Wars films, where the good guys rely on a supernatural power called "The Force." They too have made *millions* of dollars. And many modern video games are variants of these same ideas, featuring characters with special powers.

Interestingly, the ancients had their versions of superheroes too. The demigods like Achilles, Hercules, Aeneas, Helen of Sparta (or Troy), Orpheus, Perseus, and Romulus were part human, part god, and supernatural abilities, qualities, and powers were attributed to them. Then, when a good Roman emperor died, it was believed that his spirit joined the company of the gods, thus making him semi-divine and a connection that humans thus had with the gods. And then there were sorcerers who claimed to be able to tap into, and manipulate, divine powers. All of these things were core elements in the ancient world, not fringe elements. In other words, the idea of having people around who were superhuman in some way was just as fascinating and important to the ancients as superheroes are to our culture today.

What does our culture, and the ancient culture, find so attractive about superheroes that we keep

inventing new ones and keep finding new story lines for the old ones? What is this obsessive need for superheroes? It begins with a simple, common premise: evil is a power that ordinary humans cannot defeat. In fact, the evil characters in most superhero stories are evil supercharacters themselves, and it is quite often the case that these evil supercharacters are out to take over the world (or the universe, like Darth Vader). They have tapped into some supernatural source of evil (even if it is the power of being a genius, like the evil character Lex Luthor, Superman's enemy, or Otto Octavius, the "mad scientist" who is Spiderman's enemy) and they are using it to destroy the existing world and make a new world of evil in which they are the kings. Because evil characters have tapped into some kind of supernatural power, it also takes some kind of super power to defeat them.

So the basic idea behind every superhero is that all superheroes do battle against some form of evil (even the demigods in ancient Greek culture were basically warriors). That's why they are heroes. What makes them so special, though, is that they can fight evil in a way that normal people cannot. They can accomplish victories that are beyond the abilities of ordinary humans to accomplish. They right wrongs, they bring justice.

Another element common to superhero tales is that they are otherwise normal people (there may be an exception or two to this; I'm not an expert at superheroes!). Superman came from another planet but otherwise lives an ordinary life as a reporter (Clark Kent). Spiderman is the ordinary guy Peter Parker. Ironman is Tony Stark. Underdog is a shoeshine boy (dog). Batman is the ordinary (millionaire!) guy Bruce Wayne. Sure, Batman does not have superhuman powers, but he has a genius intellect and his fighting skills are perfect (and these are his "superpowers"). But for superheroes, you don't even recognize their super powers when they are acting like ordinary people. In fact, they sometimes have to "play dumb" to keep their real identities a secret. But in spite of their ordinary appearances, they are really something far from ordinary.

What I find most interesting, though, is that **all of them are pale imitations of Jesus**. Every one of them is a modernized, culturalized, and fictionalized version of what we are told about Jesus. In other words, Jesus is the reality, he is the real, true superhero, and all of these others are fakes. Jesus does battle with cosmic forces of evil and defeats them for us (**Eph 4.8; Col 2.15**). He came to earth as a man, and few people recognized that he was not just a man. But he accomplished what we could not accomplish for ourselves. As a result of his work,

we no longer have to be bound by evil, sin, and death.

I am in no way trying to reduce Jesus to the idea of a comic book superhero. Quite the opposite. I'm saying that Jesus really is everything that people are looking for in these fictional superheroes.

So if Jesus is the real superhero, if the story of Jesus is not just optimistic fiction, then why don't more people come to him and join with him?

The answer lies in the demands Jesus makes upon his followers. You see, when Superman saves the day, no one has to repent. The bad guy is defeated and captured and everyone gets to go on living their lives just the same as before. When Batman comes in and beats up all the villains, he doesn't then go around the city telling everyone that they too, are villains. In fact, Batman cooperates with the local authorities, he joins forces with them. He agrees with them. When Ironman saves the city, he does not demand that everyone has to stop being greedy. Flash Gordon never spoke out against fornication. When a superhero saves the day, he makes it possible for our world to go on just like it is. That's what people want – they want *this* world, just without the really bad guys in it. But Jesus was at odds with the religious leaders of his day and he condemned them as some of the worst culprits. In fact, the gospel says that all have sinned, that all of us have become the “bad guys” and the only way out is to submit to the demands of Jesus, who wishes to change us from our evil thoughts and ways and make us into new, pure people. Jesus says that our old self must die, be crucified along with Him, and a new, righteous self must take its place. But the world doesn't want that. They would prefer someone to come along, remove the “excessive” forms of evil, and let the rest of us go on practicing the “accepted” forms of evil. But that is not what Jesus is offering.

Furthermore, Batman comes when you call him. Just turn on the Bat-signal and he comes. Otherwise he leaves you alone. I suspect that many people wish Jesus was more like that — “stay out of my life until it I call, then come and save everything, and then let me go on doing what I was doing.” But those are not the terms that Jesus is offering. *“Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord’ and do not do what I say?”* (Luke 6.46).

Nobody wants a superhero who criticizes them or tells them they have to change their lives. As has been said many times, everyone wants a savior, few people want a lord. But with Jesus, they come as a package.

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The Blessings of the Weather

As I am writing this, on the eleventh of January, it is 21 degrees out and fairly icy. I am happy because my daughter, a nurse, was able to get home from work in Hutchinson to her home in Wichita. My hunting buddy and I just cancelled our planned excursion for this afternoon because neither of us wanted to get out on the ice. O well, at our age worse things could happen. With all of this I am glad that we got the weather. God tells us to be thankful for all things in in **Ephesians 5:20**, *“giving thanks always for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father”*.

God made a promise in **Genesis 8:22** that *“While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.”* Therefore, even though I may not see it there is a blessing in the weather, even if it seems forbidding and miserable. Just look a little closer. Do what Jesus told us to do in **John 7:24** where He said *“Judge not according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment.”* Look at all the facts.

Scientists tell us that, because of the 23 degree tilt of the earth, which causes our winter and summer, we have much more tillable land than we otherwise would have. God asked Job about snow in **Job 38:22** and Boy Scouts in Alaska earn merit badges by camping in 100 degrees below zero in snow caves they make themselves. Winter won't last forever and the snow and ice will melt giving Kansas farmers and ranchers much needed moisture. Yes thank God for the weather, and maybe just get out and enjoy it while it's here.

Cleveland Reddinger

I place no value on anything I have or may possess, except in relation to the kingdom of God. If anything will advance the interests of the kingdom, it shall be given away or kept, only as by giving or keeping it I shall most promote the glory of Him to whom I owe all my hopes in time or eternity.

David Livingstone

Phil. 3:7 *But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8 More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ,*

Psalm 1:1 *Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the wicked, Nor standeth in the way of sinners, Nor sitteth in the seat of scoffers: 2 But his delight is in the law of Jehovah; And on his law doth he meditate day and night. 3 And he shall be like a tree planted by the streams of water, That bringeth forth its fruit in its season, Whose leaf also doth not wither; And whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. 4 The wicked are not so, But are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. 5 Therefore the wicked shall not stand in the judgment, Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. 6 For Jehovah knoweth the way of the righteous; But the way of the wicked shall perish.*

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Sunday A.M. 10:20 Assembled Worship

Sunday P.M. 5:00 Assembled Worship

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Visitors welcome

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STEWARDSHIP
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SUNDAY MORNING SERMON:
THE TENDERNESS OF THE LORD



What Must I Do To Be Saved?

Hear the gospel - Romans 10:17

Believe in Jesus Christ - Hebrews 11:6

Repent of sins - Acts 17:30

Confess Christ as Lord - Romans 10:9,10

Be Baptized for remission of sins - Acts 2:38

Be Faithful unto death - Revelation 2:10