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"WHO IS THE GREATEST?" MATTHEW 18:1

By Gordon F. Nelson

The question was directed by the disciples unto Jesus because, obviously, they had a disagreement between them. Was Peter the greatest? *"Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church...and I give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."* Matthew 16:18-19. The Apostle Peter was obviously a great man to have such power granted unto one man. James and John, the sons of thunder, whose mother pleaded their case before the Lord, *"There came to him the mother of Zebedee's children (please note: Zebedee's children) with her two sons worshipping him, and desiring a certain thing of him. And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left, in thy kingdom."* Matthew 20:20-21.

The disciples were guilty of "comparing themselves among themselves". The Apostle Paul states, *"But we will not boast of things without measure, but according to the measure of the rule God hath distributed to us, a measure to reach even unto you."* 2 Corinthians 10:12-13.

To answer the question that had been directed at him, "Who is the greatest?", Matthew 18:1, Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him (the greatest) in the midst of them. You want a measure, a rule, to measure greatness. THIS is the plumbline and yardstick, to being great in the kingdom of heaven.

"And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted AND become as little children (conversion is not enough!) ye shall NOT enter into the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 18:3. Children do not allow *"the sun to go down upon your wrath."* Ephesians 4:26. *"Be ye angry, and sin not!"* Jesus was angry when He drove the moneychangers out of the temple, striking them with a cat-o'-nine- tails, overthrowing their tables, screaming like a zealot. *"It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves."* (His anger soon subsided.) *"And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple: and he healed them"*, Matthew 21:12-14, in the presence of overturned cages of sacrificial turtle doves. Oh! Don't you love Jesus! No one is like Him!

Conversion is not enough! "And become as little children." "Ye shall know them by their fruit", are the qualities that are in children. Chiefly humility, and the ability to forgive. *"For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."* Matthew 6:14-15.

Religion never forgives! The reason: it has no soul, no feeling of compassion, merely judgment to conform to some rules of man.

Jimmy Swaggart conformed to the rules laid down by the Louisiana District (of which he was a member) "to withdraw from the pulpit for three months." This was the judgment of the men who knew him the best. Reprimand; leaving his jugular vein intact. However, the thirst of the mass news media

could not be ignored by the presbyters of the General Council of the Assemblies of God. They did not disappoint the public outcry, "Crucify him!"

Religion screamed for three years! Had Jimmy Swaggart obeyed the decrees of the hierarchy, his ministry would be dead. Amazingly, Jimmy Swaggart is alive and well on public television every Saturday night at 7:00 p.m. on Channel 18 in Sacramento.

The woman caught in adultery was brought to Jesus. This was an all-male tribunal that brought this woman to Jesus while He was busy teaching the people. *"And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst, they said unto him, Master this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou?"* John 8:3-5.

A religionist never gets the scripture correctly. They either "wrest" (Gr. to wrench or pervert) the scripture, 2 Peter 3:16, or else add or subtract. *"And if any man shall take away from the words of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life."* Revelation 22:19. In the case of the woman caught in adultery, they had taken away the fact that Moses said both should be stoned. To commit adultery, you must have an accomplice. A woman is a type of the church, and the world is ready to hurl rocks at her. You may not agree with my analogy, but Jimmy Swaggart was caught in the very act by Reverend Gorman. Jimmy Swaggart was instrumental in having his same Reverend Gorman removed from the rosters of the Assembly of God because of adultery. Reverend Gorman, an ex-Assembly of God preacher, received his compensation - a pound of flesh- from the man responsible for ousting him from the Assemblies of God: Jimmy Swaggart.

"Ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky and of the earth: but how is it ye do not discern this time? Yes, and why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right?" Luke 12:56,57. These men who judged Jimmy Swaggart were as inept to judge as these men who came with their stones to judge the woman caught in the very act.

To confess your sin and say you are guilty, is a sign of weakness according to ecclesiastical hierarchism. Moses was the meekest man that ever lived, but certainly not weak! Whenever a man stands confessing his sin, you better forgive. That was what Jesus was talking about; conversion is not enough: children forgive and forget.

Every one of these men holding the stones had committed adultery with this same woman. They were all married men. If prostitutes depended on single men to sell their wares, they would be out of business. Read the story recorded in John 8:1-11. They came to accuse Jesus of not "rightly dividing the word": but what sayest thou? Jesus!

A religionist can only absorb a half-truth due to his heart's condition. Do you know what a half truth is? It is a lie. This whole entire promise of the Assembly of God organization is a half-truth. Sure, *"judgment must begin in the house of God."* 1 Peter 4:17. Exactly where the judgment began in the case of Jimmy Swaggart; his own Louisiana District. But, when they call in the entire tribunal for judgment, that is when it becomes a type of the Sanhedrin that cries for death!

In attempting to explain to the "mother of Zebedee's children" (I like this because in today's society a man has no claim to his own children) why her request for James and John could not be granted. *"Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom."* Jesus answered and said, *"Ye know not what you ask!"* Matthew 20:20-22. My kingdom is different from the kingdoms of this earth. First off, it is not for me to grant, *"but shall be given for whom it is prepared of my Father."* Jesus saw the indignation that rose up in the remaining ten disciples at the very thought of this woman's request being received. Were we not slaves under the dominion of James and John when Christ should come into his kingdom?

"But Jesus called them unto him and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you." Matthew 20:25-26. Jesus was assuring the ten that no great and noble princes (such as James and John) would rule over them. In fact, my kingdom will never be structured like Washington, D.C. and our representative form of government. This is exactly the format of government chosen by the Assemblies of God to rule over "God's heritage". Jesus was condemning this form of government that Jimmy Swaggart had allowed himself to become entwined with.

In the Teamsters Union, the problem was never the local union autonomy. It was always the big shots at the top! It is no different in religion. Proof of being a "big shot", is your ability to judge. Jesus was judged by a tribunal of men, that is why he warned, *"Beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the council."* Matthew 10:17. Jimmy Swaggart was delivered up to the Council of the Assemblies of God, *"and they will scourge you in their synagogues."*

Just as these men carrying their stones were all guilty of committing adultery with this same woman, but were men that "sit in Moses' seat", Matthew 23:2. Like the presbuteros of the Assemblies of God were accustomed to judging, they couldn't refrain from further judgment upon Jimmy Swaggart. He had already been judged by the Louisiana District of the Assemblies of God. This judgment was not severe enough to satisfy the crowds. "Crucify him!" Do you blame him for not complying to their demands?

The same people that *"took branches of palm trees and went forth to meet him and cried, Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord. And Jesus, when he had found an ass, sat thereon; as it is written, fear not, daughter of Sion; behold thy king cometh, sitting on an ass's colt"* (John 12:13-15), one week later (to show the fickleness of people) they would be screaming, "Crucify Him."

Jesus made one mistake that would enrage the Sanhedrin court and they could never forgive him in that interim of one week. Wouldn't you know, the one mistake involved money. The overthrowing of the moneychanger's tables in the temple was the unpardonable sin. *"And when the scribes and chief priests heard it, they sought how they may destroy him."* Mark 11:18. The priest of the temple alone determined if your sacrifice would be acceptable to God. Your turtledove or lamb reared on your farm was seldom (if ever) acceptable; it invariably had a blemish. Thus, you had no other alternative but to purchase from the "moneychangers" an acceptable sacrifice at an exorbitant fee. Jesus loves poor people, and is evidenced by the cat-o-nine tails he used on the backs of these thieves in the temple. Do you know this

is the only painting of Christ I would find acceptable to be in my home? Jesus flogging and overturning the moneychangers tables in the temple.

Anytime you mess with the money of the temple, even your own disciples can turn against you. This scene at the temple opened the eyes of Judas. Judas belonged and was a member of a cult called the Zealots. The Jewish Zealots hated Rome. Judas had believed the hour of Messiah had arrived when Jesus, riding on an ass (the Cadillac of that day) came into Jerusalem and everyone screamed "Hosanna in the highest". Judas anticipated his announcement that he would proclaim himself as "King of the Jews", and be a leader to throw off this Roman yoke and establish an earthly Davidic kingdom. Judas felt betrayed by Jesus when He became instead a fanatic on prayer. Instead of pronouncing a new earthly kingdom, Jesus screamed, *"My house shall be called the house of prayer, but ye have made it a den of thieves."* Luke 19:46.

At that pronouncement, Judas became so angry he couldn't see straight. It suddenly dawned on him that "the kingdom" that Jesus was referring to, truly is not of this earth.

Jesus Christ continues to insist by his example and life that His kingdom is not of this earth, but like Judas, there are those who hear what they want to hear. Even Peter was caught up in "Dominion Theology", *"and struck a servant of the high priests, and smote off his ear. Then said Jesus unto Peter, Put up again thy sword into his place...Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray my Father, and he shall presently give me twelve legions of angels?"* Matthew 26:51-53. Peter was being rebuked for his Dominion Theology!

Jesus clearly stated before Pilate, *"My kingdom is not of this world; if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews (the Sanhedrin)."* John 18:36. *"Put up thy sword, Peter, for they that take the sword shall perish with the sword."* Matthew 26:52. The kingdom of God is not enhanced by the sword to defend their cause, believe in Dominion Theology. This Theology presents itself in many forms. *"They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think he doeth God service,"* John 16:2, simply because you believe His kingdom is not of this earth, and refuse to join 666 (the real kingdom of this earth).

In 2 Timothy 4:3, we read, *"For the time will come when they shall not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned into fables."* 2 Timothy 4:3-4. Dominion Theology offers no escape from the wrath of God to be poured out upon the earth. Aren't you glad that Jesus' kingdom is not of this earth, therefore there is an escape. *"For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ."* 1 Thessalonians 5:9.

Jesus died between two thieves; this should help you! The one thief who said Jesus was a leader of a spiritual kingdom said, *"Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom"*, Luke 23:42. He was justified. The other thief viewed Christ like Judas, of this earth.

We have believed in Christ having a spiritual kingdom for so long. Keep on enduring!

Men create their own earthly kingdom and separate themselves from the main body of believers by their "man-made doctrines". It was Abraham Lincoln who said, "You can fool people some of the people some of the time, you can fool all the people some of the time, but you can't fool all of the people all of the time." Someone will figure your little kingdom out!

Even the thief on the cross recognized the fact that whenever Christ came into His kingdom, He would be the King! In Earl Paulk's kingdom, he owns it, so he must be the king over his own invention, "Dominion Theology". This doctrine is more prevalent in Atlanta, Georgia and Tulsa, Oklahoma than out here in California. These "Dominionist's" are preparing now to fight Antichrist by taking over banks, businesses, recognizing a financial war against the Babylonish system. It all seems so reasonable, that Christians are duped into some man's kingdom that is very un-democratic: rather autocratic.

Man absolutely will not repent of being a "Lord over God's heritage". We wouldn't want to be ruled by Fidel Castro, yet, in religion we are controlled by one man's persuasion all the time.

Antioch, where believers were first call Christians, is the example. The Antioch Church was ruled collectively by a board of ruling elders (Gr. presbuterous). Read Acts 13:1. *"...there were certain prophets and teachers."*

Barnabas, as the sole Apostle, was probably the chairman of the board. This was not decided by a vote, but the recognition of "gifts given to men". *"Wherefore he saith, when he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men."* Ephesians 4:8. Religion never saw William Branham as a "gift" from God. Quite the contrary, the know-it-all Bible Answer Man declared he was of the devil. "Can Satan cast out Satan", Mr. Martin? We should view our leaders in the spiritual kingdom not as elected "hirelings" and politicians, but as "gifts from God". Only in renouncing "lords" or dictatorship over the church, can we return to normalcy of scripture.

Who is the greatest among you? Certainly not because of a recently won election that guarantees the new pastor \$2,000 a week. Or the one who owns his own non-profit religious incorporation like "Family Radio, Inc." of Oakland, California. Reverend Harold Camping is the President and owner of Family Radio, Inc. He is answerable to no one.

We are well familiar with this type of thing in Pentecostal circles. He is following the example of the very men he decries, by his form of government: dictatorship.

Every preacher that teaches "rattlesnake" handling, owns the church. The door swings both ways. If you don't believe this to be a scriptural method to rid the church of hypocrites, just get out! Someone else stupid enough to believe, will take your seat when you are gone.

You can't stop the practice because there is no government in the local assembly. The snake handling preacher owns the church.

Neither can you stop Harold Camping from predicting the end of the world for the very same reason. His ministry is out of control, just as much as the snake handler! Every United Pentecostal Church is owned by the preacher, and he blasphemes the Trinitarian Godhead by preaching, "Jesus Only".

This is so ridiculous, if it were not for the people that buy Reverend Harold Camping's book, 1994?, and then believe the end of the world and the last day is October 6, 1994. Reverend Harold Camping should be denounced as a heretic. But he has respectability in the eyes of Baptists due to his "blasphemy against the Holy Ghost", stating all speaking in tongues is of the devil.

In Mark 16:18, are listed all the signs of a believer. Among them it says, *"They shall take up serpents."* Only a believer can take up a serpent. Jesus was speaking of the two-legged "varmints" that inflict doubt into the hearts of believers. The message of the serpent is as old as the Garden of God. *"And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said?"* Genesis 3:1. The serpent merely has to implant a doubt, but a believer has the authority to set the record straight. This authority that is thus granted is termed scripturally as "the taking up of serpents".

Reverend Harold Camping is a "spiritual serpent", and is more destructive to God than the faces we see posted in our Post Office for mail fraud. This is no joking matter for a servant of God to be called upon "to take up serpents". Mark 16:18.

Harold Camping is a classic illustration of a carnal man attempting to understand the Bible without first inviting the Holy Ghost to become the teacher. *"But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things."* John 14:26. Harold Camping is one of the wise and prudent Jesus referred to in his prayer. *"I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight. All things are delivered unto me of my Father; and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father; save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him."* Matthew 11:25-27.

It is not enough to be converted. You must become as a child to be the greatest in the kingdom of God.