

INTENTIONAL IGNORANCE

By Dub McClish

It would be difficult to exaggerate the cursed consequences of ignorance. Various prophets explicitly blamed the downfall of God's Old Testament people on their ignorance of God and His law. God's indictment of His people through Hosea says it all: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I also will forget thy children" (Hos. 4:6, emph. DM). Because of their rebellion God finally sent them into captivity in a strange land. We read the record of the apostasy of the Jews and wonder at their folly. Then, often without realizing it, thousands among God's spiritual Israel duplicate their foolish errors. One of the greatest populaters of Hell will doubtless be ignorance.

Sundry Observations on Ignorance

Not all ignorance is bad. Stated another way, it is good to be ignorant of some things. Paul once wrote: "I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple unto that which is evil" (Rom. 16:19b). It is impossible to avoid all of the tawdry, profane, indecent, and wicked influences in our profane, sex-saturated society. They slap us in the face from billboards, radio and television, the Internet, magazines, movies, and "music." However, for the sake of pure minds and lives we must filter out all of the trash we can (Phi. 4:8). We need to remain as ignorant as possible about the filth and evil of the corrupt culture of our times. Ignorance of these things really is bliss.

Not all ignorance is avoidable. Regardless of one's brilliance and education level, he/she will still be ignorant about some things. This statement is true of secular knowledge due to the vast wealth of extant information. It is no less true of spiritual Truth: "Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? ...the world through its wisdom knew not God" (1 Cor. 1:20–21). If one could totally avoid ignorance he would be omniscient. However, the admission that no human being can know all things does not imply (per agnosticism) that no one can know anything. We can (must) know the Truth which makes us free in Christ (John 8:31–32) because it has been revealed by the Holy Spirit through inspired men (1 Cor. 2:7–10, 13; 2 Tim. 3:16–17).

Some are ignorant twice over. They are ignorant, and they are ignorant of their ignorance. The old Arabic apothegm says it well: "He who knows not and knows not he knows not, he is a fool." "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes" (Pro. 12:15a) is Solomon's version of the same idea. It is downright disgusting to listen to someone who thinks himself to be an

expert spout false information. Pity the congregation that appoints a man as an elder who knows little of the Bible, but who fancies himself a Bible scholar!

Men bereft of extensive formal education are not necessarily ignorant. Some of the greatest Gospel preachers and Bible scholars of the past two centuries have been men who had little opportunity to attend school. We should be thankful for highly educated men who loved Truth, such as the Campbells, Lard, McGarvey, and, more recently, Brewer and Warren. However, where would the church be without the likes of Raccoon John Smith, Ben Franklin, and Gus Nichols—spiritual giants and scholars who lacked formal education?

When we warn of the pitfalls of higher education for Gospel preachers, we should never leave the impression that there is some safety or advantage in ignorance for the sake of ignorance. There is an old tale that depicts an anti-education preacher boasting from the pulpit of his ignorance: “I ain’t never been to nobody’s college, and I ain’t never goin’. Furthermore, I pray that God will make me igner’nter and igner’nter.” Someone in the back was heard to mutter, “Poor God. He’s sure got a job on His hands!”

The church has suffered greatly from ignorance for several years. It is filled with Biblical illiterates, for lack of a better term. Preachers dare not underestimate the Biblical ignorance of their auditors if they wish to be understood. Bible facts (e.g., narratives, occurrences, places, and persons), which were “common knowledge” two generations ago, now have to be explained. This woeful condition prevails, not because of inability or opportunity to learn, but (at least in part) because of laziness, carelessness, apathy, and neglect. Elders, teachers, preachers, and parents must ever seek ways to motivate the saints to exclaim with David, “Oh how love I thy law! It is my meditation all the day” (Psa. 119:97).

The Worst Ignorance of All

Ignorance of the Bible, whatever the causes, is a terrible handicap. However, if there is one cause of ignorance that is worse than others, it surely is self-imposed, intentional ignorance. There have been some dedicated Bible ignoramuses in every local congregation of which I have been a member. These folk devoutly believe in the bliss of Bible ignorance and are determined to maintain their happy state. They refuse to do more than nibble a bit on the Bread of Life occasionally. They despise the Sunday morning and Wednesday night Bible classes—they simply refuse to attend. Preaching, visiting, and encouraging simply do not move them.

These folk attend Sunday morning worship if it is convenient (which it rarely ever is on Sunday evening). Can anyone realistically imagine that they read their Bibles at home? Such folk will have much for which to answer on this account, if none other, at the Judgment. Even

among brethren who are faithful in Bible class and worship attendance, few can be persuaded to buy and read good books that will add to their Biblical knowledge. Some of these same folk may gladly pay \$25.00 for the latest novel (which may be filled with gutter language), but they would not consider spending half that amount on a book to help them go to Heaven.

There is another area of spiritual information upon which many have deliberately chosen to remain ignorant. This area of ignorance has already had devastating effects upon the church worldwide. It manifests itself as sort of an “elitism.” I have observed it in many rank and file Christians, but I have especially seen it in certain preachers, elders, and university professors and administrators. These folk seem to consider it a mark of spiritual superiority to remain ignorant of false doctrine and its proponents. They pride themselves on being unaware of “brotherhood issues” and “problems” (as if ignorance would make them magically disappear).

Twenty years ago a group of about fifty brethren (I among them) approached an eldership with deep concerns about liberal influences in the congregation. The spokesman for the elders said he had heard people talk about liberalism in politics, in the schools, and in the church, but he did not know what they were talking about. He had remained intentionally ignorant of matters all about him. Predictably, that church has digressed increasingly under his leadership. Such brethren sometimes boast, “I never read any of the brotherhood papers.” These are the sort who do not “have a clue” about the current apostasy, and they are perfectly content in their ignorance.

A few weeks ago I received a letter from an elder requesting some information on Max Lucado, if I had any. The elder said he had been told that Lucado was a false teacher, but had “never read any publications” that so stated. He explained that he did not “want to accuse him if he is a sound Gospel preacher.” I appreciate his seeking information and not wanting to falsely accuse. However, with the volume of material published in papers and books in the past six or seven years on this fallen brother, it is amazing that a man charged with protecting the church had read none of it. He has either not been reading the papers he needs to read or he has been reading none at all! How can shepherds feed and watch for the safety of the flock (Acts 20:28–31) if they are not constantly reading and informing themselves?

On “Keeping Files”

More than once within the past twenty-five years I have registered my dismay to administrators in universities operated by brethren concerning some of the men they featured on their lecture programs. The administrators consistently pleaded ignorance. Yet one of the objectionable speakers lived in the same city as the university that invited him, and his

participation in an interdenominational “unity” meeting appeared in their local paper only a few months before. The administrator self-righteously responded to my concern by saying, “I do not keep files on my brethren.” I told him he would not have even needed to “keep files” on this brother if he would just read his own newspaper! Another administrator from a different school likewise chided me a few years later for “keeping files” (do they all have the same handbook with the same pat responses?).

Does John’s command to “prove the spirits” (1 John 4:1) still apply? Are we accountable to the Lord’s command to “beware of false prophets” (Mat. 7:14)? If so, then we (especially elders and preachers) are obligated to stay informed concerning what brethren are saying, writing, and doing. The Lord apparently “kept some files” on the scribes and Pharisees (Mat. 15:1–14; 23:1–36). Paul must have had a rather extensive set of “files” on various brethren (Rom. 16:17–18; 1 Cor. 1:10–12; Gal. 1:6–9; 2:11–14; Phi. 3:2; 2 The. 3:6, 14; 1 Tim. 1:19–20; 2 Tim. 2:16–18; 4:9; Tit. 1:11–12; et al.). Apparently Peter, John, and Jude kept some “files” (2 Pet. 2:17–22; 1 John 2:19; 4:1–3; 3 John 9–10; Jude 4, 11–16). It matters not whether these “files” were kept mentally or in written form—in principle there is no difference. These men did not pride themselves in being ignorant of what false men were doing and saying, as some do presently.

It is impossible to please some folk. When we must regretfully expose the digression of some brother or brethren, those who are exposed (or their defenders) immediately ask for proof (in other words, “files”). Yet if we keep careful files and records, they call us “witch-hunters,” “watch dogs,” or worse.

Some elderships/congregations have not been innocent victims of liberalism and apostasy, but have knowingly led the way, while others have eagerly embraced digression and unauthorized change when it came their way. However, some elders/congregations have simply been victimized by apostasy because of their woeful ignorance, either of the Bibles, of the men leading the digression, or both. It is a foregone conclusion that those who do not know the Truth cannot recognize error when they hear it or see it. Many have been duped by sweet-talking, forked-tongued deceivers simply because their Truth tanks registered all but “empty.”

There is simply no excuse for intentional, self-imposed ignorance! The body of Christ has paid and is paying a terrible price for it. Let us all study God’s Word more. Let us also read good books and journals that will build our knowledge of the Truth and keep us informed on what is transpiring in the church of God. Some of us have much catching up to do!

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