

Section 3: A Man or an Institution?<sup>1</sup>

I will give you shepherds after my own heart,  
and they will feed you knowledge and understanding.

Jeremiah 3:15

Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter  
the sheep of my pasture! says the LORD.

Jeremiah 23:1

## God-sense

Pastors, or shepherds, who serve religious institutions routinely exhort believers to join the institution, and they frown upon or pity anyone who follows a man instead. Such a somber warning may have an appearance of wisdom at first, but it is, in fact, self-serving nonsense. The only people on earth who can possibly be doing things God's way are those who are following a man. Paul and Peter were not misleading God's saints when instead of saying, "Follow Christ", they exhorted the saints to follow them and others who were like them (Phip. 3:17; 2Thess. 3:9; 1Pet. 5:3). They knew that believers need examples they can see and that those sent by God are examples to be followed. Peter said to the shepherds among believers,

1Peter 5

1b. I exhort the elders who are among you:

2. shepherd the flock of God that is with you, exercising oversight not under compulsion but willingly, neither for sordid gain, but eagerly,
3. nor as lording it over those assigned *to you*, but by being examples for the flock.

By exhorting the saints to be followers of him (1Cor. 4:16), Paul was not denying that Jesus is the Chief Shepherd; he was only pointing out his place in God's order, under Jesus. Paul knew that the way his converts would please God was to follow him, the man God had anointed and sent to them. People who become members of a religious institution cannot possibly be doing things God's way because God has never sent a religious institution to do anything. God only anoints a *who*, never a *what*.

Peter said, "If any man speak, let it be as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let it be with the strength that God supplies, so that in all things, God might be glorified through Jesus Christ" (1Pet. 4:11). No institution has ever spoken "as an oracle of God" or ministered His grace to God's people. Only people chosen and sent by God can speak God's word (Jn. 3:34a), and He sends no one to whom He has not given the Spirit. No institution has ever been baptized with the Spirit (Jesus did not die for institutions), and no institution possesses the power either to minister the gospel or to ordain someone to do so. Seminaries can teach subjects such as biblical history and languages, but such education cannot to the slightest degree make a man a minister of Christ. Only "the strength that God supplies" does that.

It is not uncommon for people who are searching for the truth to search for it in a religious institution, or several of them. It is also possible to follow the wrong *who* for a time, but everyone who persists in seeking the truth will find the right *who*; Jesus will not fail them. When God calls for us to "come out from their midst" (2Cor. 6:17), He is not just calling us away from the wrong *who*; He is

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<sup>1</sup> By "Institution", I am referring specifically to the religious Institution known as Christianity, or the Church, which is fragmented into hundreds of sects, or denominations, which may themselves also be called institutions. Much more on the Christian Institution in Chapter 10.

calling us into fellowship with the right *who*. Even intelligent sinners know that nations do well when they follow leaders who have good sense. The spiritual equivalent to that carnal wisdom is to follow men who have God-sense, that is, men “who by experience have the senses trained to discern both good and evil” (Heb. 5:14).

Throughout history, whenever righteousness has been accomplished in the earth, it has been accomplished by individuals anointed and sent by God—in spite of religious institutions, not because of them. Religious institutions have always been the greatest stumbling-block for those who are sincerely seeking God and the greatest instigators of persecution against those who find Him.

### Balaam

An old saying goes, “If you can’t beat ’em, join ’em.” Satan’s version of that saying is, “If you can’t beat ’em, invite ’em to join you.” That is to say, if you can’t stop God from sending servants to His people (and no one can), then warn believers not to follow a man and invite them to join your institution. That tactic has often succeeded, the Old Testament event at Baal-Peor being a notable example.

After Moab’s King Balak failed to beat Israel, the prophet Balaam advised the king to use Moabite women to invite Israel to join them:

Numbers 25

2. And the Moabite women invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people feasted and bowed themselves to the gods of those women.
- 3a. And Israel joined himself to Baal at Peor.

Balaam devised that crafty counsel (Num. 31:16; Rev. 2:14), but for him, the gold he won by doing so was not worth it, for he lost his soul in the process. From that time on, God no longer considered Balaam to be a prophet, but a soothsayer (cf. Josh. 13:22).

King Balak triumphed over Israel with friendliness after failing to have a curse put on them (Num. 23–24). That crafty tactic is described in another place as destroying souls with peace (Dan. 8:25), and in part, it is because men of the Institution are so successful in winning hearts with friendliness that James scolded certain wavering saints, “You adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that the friendship of the world is enmity against God? Therefore, whoever would be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God” (Jas. 4:4b). The erotic lifestyle and worship of the Moabites was certainly “enmity against God”, and when the Israelites “began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab,” they became enemies of God, “and the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel” (Num. 25:1b, 3b).

### Which God and Which Jesus?

Observing the sinful conduct of his fellow Israelites, Isaiah said, “We all, like sheep, have gone astray; every one of us has turned to his own way” (Isa. 53:6a). He saw that most of God’s people were living by whatever standard suited them instead of by God’s law. But why did so many in Israel do that? Why did they trade their hope of eternal life for the vanity of heathen myths? The answer is that instead of the simple standard of holiness found in the law of Moses, the Israelites, in the main, followed false prophets who, in turn, were following the example of the heathen, whose grandiose ideas about divine things were more accommodating to man’s fleshly nature. God’s way is simple and unadorned; it does not attract the flesh. Man’s way are intricate and stylish; it is altogether of the flesh. King Ahaz’ admiration of an ornate heathen altar provides an excellent example:

## 2Kings 15

10. When King Ahaz went to Damascus to meet Tiglath-Pileser the king of Assyria, he saw an altar that was in Damascus. And King Ahaz sent to Uriah the priest [in Jerusalem] a pattern of the altar, and its design, with all the workmanship of it.
11. And Uriah the priest built the altar. In accordance with all that King Ahaz had sent *him* from Damascus, so Uriah the priest made it before King Ahaz came from Damascus.

Ahaz ordered God's plain altar to be moved from its place in front of God's temple so that the fancier one might be placed there (2Kgs. 15:14). To Ahaz and those like him, God's altar was embarrassingly simple (cf. Ex. 20:25; Dt. 27:5), too plain to be worthy of a God who was truly mighty. It could not compete with stylish heathen altars. But God does not compete with men; He makes the way for their sins to be forgiven, and they can take it or leave it. Jeremiah pleaded with Israel, "Do not learn the way of the Gentiles" (Jer. 10:2a), but they learned it anyway and, so, worshipped the gods of their choice rather than the God who had chosen them.

God's New Testament people have done the same. Instead of worshipping God in spirit and in truth, as Jesus said, believers join the church that seems best to them. What the false prophets once exhorted God's people to do is comparable to what men of the Institution now exhort God's people to do, using such phrases as "join the church of your choice".

There is no difference between "join the church of your choice" and "worship the god of your choice." The god and Jesus of Catholicism cannot be the god and Jesus of Mormonism any more than the gods of the Egyptians were the gods of the Moabites. Nor can the god and Jesus of Presbyterianism be the same god and Jesus of Pentecostalism. Common sense, if nothing else, tells us that the god and Jesus of one Christian sect cannot be the god and Jesus of another, for those gods and Jesuses demand different doctrines, differing qualifications for their ministers, and different rituals for worship. Christianity is a madhouse of confusion, just like the polytheism of the ancient world.

The spirits which inspired the formation of Christianity and the sects within it all proclaim, as the true gospel, doctrines and traditions that are not only different from each other, but contrary to the simple way of Christ. In the kingdom of God, there is but one true Jesus, one holy Spirit, one body, one faith, one baptism, and one hope (Eph. 4:4-6). And as has been said, there is but one acceptable manner of worship: "in spirit and in truth" (Jn. 4:24). To worship as ministers who serve the gods and Jesuses of Christianity teach is to honor their gods and Jesuses instead of the living God and His Son.

Let me restate a previous question: Which God and Jesus do you believe in? Which Bridegroom are you going out to meet, the one who is really coming again or one who is proclaimed by men of the Institution? Which God is the God of your manner of living and your worship? Is it a god that you have chosen, or is it the God who chose you, "the One who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1Pet. 2:9b)? It is better to be chosen than to choose, for we cannot trust our own wisdom to choose the right thing, or the right *who*. Jeremiah warned us that the human heart is not merely deceitful, but that it is more "deceitful than anything" (Jer. 17:9). At the Last Supper, Jesus told his disciples, "You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you" (Jn. 15:16). That is God's order.

The human heart is unwilling to believe this truth because man's corrupt nature demands a distant god, one that cannot truly be known, for with that kind of god, the flesh does not have to inconvenience itself to learn His ways and walk in them. That is, in fact, the only kind of god our fleshly nature will ever willingly serve. Speaking for us all, Paul confessed that "in me, that is, in my flesh, dwells nothing good" (Rom. 7:18). Based on that spiritual reality, we know that whenever man's worthless flesh finds a god it is pleased to serve, that god is as worthless as the flesh that chose it.

Any god we loved while living “in the flesh” had to be a god we had no hope of knowing, and we liked it that way. That is the kind of god that we as sinners have always preferred and have flattered as being a god so profound that He is unknowable. But we knew in our guilty hearts that as long as we clung to that kind of god, we did not have to inconvenience ourselves with striving to know and to please him. None of us would have chosen the real Jesus to be our Messiah, nor would we have chosen his Father to be our God. We are neither wise enough nor good enough to have done that. God had to choose us.

God’s kingdom is a kingdom of the heart, a spiritual kingdom that no one can enter by his own will; we must be invited to come (Jn. 6:44; 15:16). Those who are invited into God’s kingdom by His servants (Mt. 22:1–4) are given a choice that the world does not have. God’s invitation sets them free by giving them a choice, either to come into the kingdom or to refuse. Without that invitation, sinners have no choice but to remain in sin. The call of God is an invitation to follow His representatives into the “newness of life” (Rom. 6:4).

It is not possible to safely trust any human claim, including our own, until the life of God transforms us into the kind of people who can be trusted. That blessed state is the place to which God’s representatives lead us so that we can serve God acceptably and be blessed. But if after we are converted, we choose to become a member the Institution, then the Institution will get the glory for the good that God has done in us, and we will get the curse for the evil done by the Institution. (Rev. 18:4b–5).

God accepts no praise from humans except the praise that comes from sanctified souls. If we would offer the Father acceptable worship, we ourselves must first be made acceptable to Him. This truth applies to everyone, everywhere. Human praise comes from the human spirit, and it is impossible that the human spirit can worship God acceptably, or please Him (Rom. 8:8). In his time among us, Jesus knew that human praise could not be trusted because he knew that, at that time, all humans were still merely human (Jn. 2:23–25).

#### Just a Few

Since nothing good dwells in us, as Paul said, it follows that if anyone feels guilt for doing wrong, it is never that he is convicted by his own conscience, for conviction for sin is good, and good is not in us. It is God’s Spirit alone which convicts of sin (Jn. 16:8–9), not the human conscience. Without the influence of God’s Spirit, man has no conscience and feels neither guilt for evildoing nor fear of the coming Judgment. It is only because God loves people that He makes them feel bad when they do evil, for in feeling bad about their sin, they may develop a desire to stop sinning. Likewise, if anyone ever feels good after doing what is right, he feels good only because God makes him feel good, and He does so in order to encourage that soul to keep doing what is right. If untouched by God’s Spirit, humans are dead to both the love and the fear of God, and as history has shown, the evil which humans without a conscience may do is horrific. Goodness holds no charm for the soul that does not love and fear God.

When God sends conviction on people, offering them the gift of eternal life, most push past both the conviction and the offer, and continue on the path of sin. Only a few turn from evil and receive the life-giving gift of the Spirit:

#### Matthew 7

13. Enter by the strait gate because the gate is wide and the road is broad that leads to damnation, and there are many who enter by it.
14. How strait the gate and narrow the road that leads to life! And few there be who find it.

## Behaving Like a Human

Within decades after the Spirit first came, those who had received it drifted into sectarianism, forming religious clubs. Paul crushed those buds of religious institutionalism when he saw them sprouting in God's garden:

### 1Corinthians 1

11. It has been reported to me concerning you, my brothers, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you.
12. What I mean is that each of you says, "I am of Paul"; "I am of Apollos"; "I am of Cephas"; "I am of Christ."
13. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you, or were you baptized in the name of Paul?

### 1Corinthians 3

3. You are still carnal. For as long as envy and strife and dissensions are among you, are you not carnal, and behave like a human?
4. For when one says, "I am of Paul", and another, "I of Apollos", are you not carnal?

Modern believers should ask themselves what the difference is in saying, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Peter," or "I am of Apollos," and saying, "I am a Lutheran," or "I am a Catholic," or "I am a Baptist," or, for that matter, "I am a Christian"? It is all wrong. The spirits which inspire the formation of sects and adorning them with religious titles are evil. It is the way of the world. It was ungodly in Paul's day for believers to divide themselves into religious clubs, and it is ungodly now, even if believers do not call them clubs, but denominations. Division is division, no matter what label men may put on it.

## The Great Apostasy

In spite of their efforts to establish believers in the Faith, when the apostles grew old and began to die out, they were forced to admit that false teachers had won the battle for the hearts of many, if not most of God's people:

### 2Timothy 1

15. You know this, that all they in Asia have forsaken me, among whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes.

### 1John 2

- 18b. As you have heard that the anti-Christ is coming, even now many have become anti-Christ.

### Jude 1

- 4a. Certain men have crept in who were long ago designated for this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into licentiousness.

In spite of that reality, God's representatives continued to labor until the end to save whoever would listen to them:

### Jude 1

- 3b. I felt constrained to write you, exhorting you to earnestly contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.
5. I want to remind you, though you once knew this, that the LORD, after He saved a people out of Egypt, later destroyed those who did not believe.

## 2Peter 1

13. I consider it a righteous thing to stir you up by reminding *you*, as long as I am in this tabernacle,
14. knowing that the departure from my tabernacle is imminent, as our Lord Jesus Christ has shown me.
15. Moreover, I will make every effort to see to it that after my departure, you always have these things in remembrance.

## 2Peter 3

1. This second letter I am now writing to you, beloved, in both of which I am stirring up your pure minds by way of a reminder,
2. that you should remember the words spoken before by the holy prophets, and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles.

Paul's heart was broken when he saw the great apostasy beginning to take place (cf. Phip. 3:18–19). His converts everywhere had begun to follow ministers who were leading them into a carnal religion. In that carnal religion, as the apostles knew would happen, ceremonial form quenched the Spirit of life for which Jesus had suffered and died. “False brothers stealthily . . . slipped in,” Paul wrote to the Galatians, “in order to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might enslave us” (Gal. 2:4). The slavery about which Paul was speaking was slavery to rituals that use carnal elements, such as water, bread and wine, and incense:

## Galatians 4

9. Formerly, when you did not know God, you lived as slaves to things which by nature are not divine [carnal rituals],
9. but now, having come to know God—or rather, having been known by God—how is it that you want to return again to live—again!—as slaves to weak and worthless elements?

The apostles were frustrated in their purpose, just as the ancient prophets were, by men who preferred an institution to the *whos* of God.<sup>2</sup> Paul bitterly expressed his wish that the men who were leading his converts that way would be cut off from God (Gal. 5:12), that is, that they would be damned. And he pleaded with his converts not to fall into their trap, for their doctrine was not from Jesus:

## Galatians 5

7. You were running well; who hindered you from obeying the truth?
8. This persuasion is not from the One who is calling you.

Scriptures such as those above show us that even in the days of the apostles, Satan was working through unwise believers to form an institution to which he could invite all believers, and thereby separate them from those who were the government of God. In that effort, Satan's succeeded spectacularly in the early-fourth century by inspiring men to establish the Institution of Christianity, and later in that century, by imposing Roman Church religion upon all of society. Christianity is completely foreign to Christ; though it bears his name, it is only a blend of Roman traditions and doctrines of apostate believers.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> A full explanation will be given in the next chapter.

<sup>3</sup> See book four of my Iron Kingdom series, *The Synthesis of Rome and the Body of Christ*, available for reading or download at [GoingttoJesus.com](http://GoingttoJesus.com).

Some of the leaders of God's children were seduced by the gifts and promises from Constantine, the Emperor of Rome, to blend with the Roman Empire,<sup>4</sup> and the Institution that was formed from that unholy alliance named itself "Christianity".<sup>5</sup> Holy men who were sent from God, "not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and power" (1Cor. 2:4) were supplanted by men ordained by the Institution, with its doctrines and rites enforced by the State. But in replacing true servants of Jesus, the Christian empire had replaced the true Jesus with a false one, and in replacing the true Jesus, Satan and his ministers had replaced the true God with one more to their liking.

When Satan offered Jesus the world, he turned it down, but when Rome offered believers the world, they accepted it. Those who didn't were cruelly persecuted for it. The body of Christ was lured into bed with the world and was transformed by her treachery against Christ into "the Great Whore" of John's Revelation (Rev. 17:1), the mysterious "Babylon the Great, the Mother of harlots and abominations of the earth" (Rev. 17:5). When John saw her in a vision, the woman was "drunk on the blood of the saints and on the blood of the martyrs of Jesus", which would prove true in the centuries that followed. The sight astonished John (Rev. 17:6).

The lie upon which the Great Whore is founded is that to belong to her means to belong to Christ. She never stopped claiming to be the bride of Christ, and men never stopped believing her. It is not true that Christianity represents Christ, but the whole world thinks that it does. Most of God's children believe that lie, too, and they join Christian churches because of it, thinking that joining a church demonstrates the sincerity of their faith. The very title of the Institution, "*Christianity*", attracts God's children and makes them want to join her. So, when God calls them out of sin, they innocently go about looking for a "good church" to join. They do not know that when God convicts us and calls us out of sin, He is calling us only to Himself, not to Christianity. All anyone needs is to be in Christ. In him, we are righteous in God's sight, needing nothing else, for we are "complete in him who is the head of every ruler and authority" (Col. 2:10).

It grieves our heavenly Father for us to hear His call and then, thinking to please Him, make ourselves members of the most wicked thing on earth, "Babylon the Great, the Mother of harlots and the abominations of the earth" (Rev. 17:5). The darkness of the world at large cannot compare to the darkness of the Institution, for it is "the dwelling place of demons, and a prison for every unclean spirit, and a prison for every unclean and loathsome bird" (Rev. 18:2).

### Finding Glory

Many of God's children who join a Christian church live unsatisfied lives, unfulfilled in Church religion, but thinking they are pleasing God, they go along with the program. They do not know that the liberty and joy Christ purchased for them can be had in this life. As one dear sister told me after she discovered the truth, "I thought we had to wait until after death to be this happy and free." This stirs up the memory of an old camp meeting hymn:<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Constantine made the Roman Empire's proposal of marriage to the body of Christ, but it was the Emperor Theodosius who consummated the marriage of apostate believers and the world. His law code forbade anyone in the Empire from practicing any religion other than the one that the Empire and those believers produced: Christianity (*The Theodosian Code*, 16.1.2; 16.5.1; 16.5.6; 16.10.4).

<sup>5</sup> This officially took place in AD 325 at Nicea, in what is called The First Ecumenical Council.

<sup>6</sup> "I'm Finding Glory All Along the Way" by Herbert Buffam (1879-1939).

## 1

Once I tho't that "Glory Land" was just above the sky,  
 which I never hoped to enter 'til my time should come to die.  
 But since I came to Jesus and He took my sins away,  
 I am finding glory all along the straight and narrow way.

## Chorus:

I am finding glory all along the way (blessed way).  
 I am finding glory all along the way (the shining way).  
 Ever since the Savior came—O Glory to His name!  
 I am finding glory all along the way (shining way).

## 2

Then I tho't the Land of Canaan was where Jesus dwells,  
 that the Jordan was the river that we cross at evening bells.  
 The fruits of Joy and Gladness would be mine some future day,  
 but I'm living now in Beulah, finding glory all the way.

## 3

O, you need not wait for death to set your spirit free.  
 You may have the joy and glory Jesus died to purchase thee;  
 Just come today repenting of your sins, and then obey  
 the still voice of God, and you will find there's glory all the way.

## 4

And unless we have the glory in our hearts down here,  
 we can never join the chorus when our Savior shall appear.  
 Get oil within your vessels! Jesus says to watch and pray.  
 Then you'll find you're getting glory all along the narrow way.

Ellen Payne, my sister-in-law, once testified that "you get what you settle for." And my father often lamented that, as he said it, "God's children are living far below their privilege." The traditions and doctrines of Christianity force those within it to settle for far less than is available in Christ Jesus, and is the privilege, if not the duty, of all God's children to hear the Savior's call and "come out of her," and to follow his representatives "outside the camp, bearing his reproach" (Heb. 13:13).

## Using The Dead

When God's prophets labored among God's Old Testament people, false prophets slandered them and praised the long-dead "father Abraham". Later, when the prophets were safely in the grave, deceivers praised both Abraham and the prophets, but slandered Jesus. Later still, after Jesus was gone, false apostles praised Abraham, the prophets, and Jesus, but persecuted Paul and denounced the gospel Jesus gave him. Within a few generations more, as the Institution of Christianity developed, its ministers praised Abraham, the prophets, Jesus, and Paul while slandering and persecuting the *who* of God in their time.

Men of the Institution have always praised dead servants of God; it's the living men of God who give them problems. Dead prophets are gone, and their words can be twisted into new meanings. They no longer pose a threat to the Institution because they are no longer here to denounce those who pervert



their words, as Paul, while still alive, condemned those who perverted his (Rom. 3:7–8). Peter did not preach Paul’s gospel for the Gentiles, for he had a different gospel for the Jews (Gal. 2:7); nevertheless, he acknowledged Paul’s gospel as being of God and condemned those who perverted Paul’s words:

### 2Peter 3

15. Consider the patience of our Lord to be salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul has also written to you according to the wisdom given to him,
16. as also in all his letters when speaking in them about these matters, among which are some things hard to understand, which those who are ignorant and unstable twist to their own damnation, as they also do the other scriptures.

A later generation of false teachers began to claim both Paul and Peter as their spiritual fathers, for those two were then safely in the grave. And so it has continued to this day. Men of the Institution claim to be the spiritual descendants of such men, using the blessed memory of true men of God to legitimize themselves. But they use their words only to benefit the Institution. Jesus did not spare such hypocrites his wrath:

### Matthew 23

29. Woe to you scribes and Pharisees! Hypocrites! You erect the tombs of the prophets and decorate the monuments of the righteous,
30. and you say, “If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the murder of the prophets.”
31. Thus you bear witness against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets!
32. Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers!
33. You snakes! You offspring of vipers! How can you escape the damnation of Gehenna?<sup>7</sup>

Writing this reminds me of an elderly, righteous woman in my hometown. She was, in the early 1900s, a founding member of a local holiness church. During one of my visits with her, in which we would enjoy sweet fellowship in the Spirit, she told me a story of “takin’ in washin’”, that is, washing neighbors’ clothes by hand on a scrub board, to earn an extra dime a week to contribute to the church’s building fund. Her humble home was close to the church that was eventually built; however, in her last years, she was too feeble to walk that far, and no member of the church, no relative, and no church official would respond to her requests to be carried to church meetings. They all knew (because she let them know, as she did me) that if she went, she would reprove the entire congregation for their increasing worldliness, and she would have been right to do so. Years before, as a teenager, I attended that same church, and so I knew many of its members well. The errors in the congregation that she was seeing were serious errors, and as a godly elder, her feelings and thoughts would have benefitted them if she had been given an opportunity to express them. But at no time in her last years was she allowed to attend their church meetings to testify about what she saw.

When this precious old saint died, I made the 120-mile trip from my home to be at her funeral, which was attended by a large number of people. I sat near the back of the church, and the scene before me nearly took my breath away. Some of the same people who had for so long refused to allow this dear mother in Christ into their church while she was alive were praising her to the highest for her holy life

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<sup>7</sup> Jesus used “Gehenna” when speaking of the Lake of Fire (cf. Rev. 20:10, 14–15), as is explained in my book, *What the Bible really says about HELL*, available for online reading or download at [GoingtJesus.com](http://GoingtJesus.com).

and her long-standing loyalty to their church. They told stories about her, including her work to establish the church in that city. Had I not known better, I would have thought she all but lived in that church building and did little else but work for its success. Before the funeral service even began, two middle-aged men sat in the pew in front of me talking aloud about their connections with the dead saint. The first man, a part-time minister who had grown up in that church, spoke in glowing terms of how much the deceased saints had helped him and his young bride when they first married. The other man responded, claiming with evident pride that when he was an infant, she had nursed him from her own breasts when his mother was sick.

It was a heart-rending scene. Now that the old saint was dead, she was useful. With her voice stilled by death, her body was allowed into the building. Now, to be known to have been close to her was to have status in the Assembly, and that status was a prize for which people strove with competing tales. That is how dead servants of God are used by those of the Institution.

The wise take advantage of God's servants while they are alive. They draw wisdom from them and follow them, even if it means that they are persecuted for doing so.

### God Is Winning

Falling asleep in Jesus without persuading others of the truth does not make a man a failure, even if religionists use the dead saint's name or corpse to bolster their status in the world. Jesus failed to persuade Israel that he was their Messiah and was crucified; yet, through death, Jesus accomplished his mission to purchase the life of God for us. No one could prevent it, not even by killing him, and no one has ever been able to undo it, not even by teaching that the days of miracles have passed. Later, when religious leaders persecuted those who had received God's life, their cruelty had an effect similar to that of trying to stamp out a fire in dry brush. It only spread the flames: "On that day, a great persecution broke out against the Assembly in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria" (Acts 8:1b). Every moment, in every situation, God is winning, and eventually, He always makes it obvious. So, let us "rejoice in hope" and echo Paul's praise: "Thanks be to God who, in Christ, always leads us in Triumph" (2Cor. 2:14).