

## EXCUSES!

It did not begin with modern times—this practice of making excuses. It goes clear back to the book of Genesis and the first human pair. It spans the centuries and even on Judgment Day, according to Jesus, some will still offer excuses!

When “the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden,” it must have been a beautiful place! Today, even with the curse on the land, there are beautiful gardens with flowers, shrubs, and trees in park-like settings. But these have been planted by *men*. How much more beautiful must this garden have been, for it was planted by *God!*

It was here, within this Edenic paradise, that God placed Adam and Eve. And, we should note, it was Adam and Eve—not Adam and Steve!

Here they could partake of the fruit of the various trees, but one part God retained to himself—the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. We all know the story. God asked Adam: “Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?” Adam’s answer became a pattern for excuse making that has plagued mankind ever since. Notice how quick he was to make an excuse—shifting the blame to the woman!

“The *woman* whom you gave to be with me, *she* gave me of the tree and I did eat” (Gen. 3:12).

Not only did Adam blame the woman, it is almost like he blamed God also—“...the woman that *you* gave to be with me.” Today, people do wrong and try to blame God. But, “Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God...every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed” (James 1:13,14).

When God asked Eve about the situation, her reply was: “The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat.” Does this sound familiar? Still today, there are some who offer the excuse: “The Devil made me do it!”

The first thing people do when they go wrong is blame *someone else*. They blame the preacher, the teacher, the deacons, the inlaws, the outlaws! They blame their husband or wife, as the case may be. “Oh if my

wife would serve God, I would serve him!” Better serve God whether she ever does or not. “If my husband would give his heart to the Lord, so would I.” Better do it anyhow! Trying to put the blame on others robs us of God’s best in our lives.

“So then every one of us shall give account of *himself* to God” (Rom. 14:12).

There are some who will not attend church. They say there’s a hypocrite in the church. But if there’s a hypocrite standing between you and God—*he’s closer to God than you are!* Think about it. We don’t throw all our money away just because there are a few counterfeit bills in circulation. If there’s a counterfeit, it implies there is the genuine. If there’s a false, there must be a true. If there is a wrong, there must be a right.

Let me tell you about a man who spent a lot of time walking around in the desert—an expert at excuse making. One day he saw a bush that was on fire. It was not a stately oak or a majestic fir; just one of so many dust-covered bushes on the desert. But there was something different about this bush—it was on fire and not consumed. It grabbed his attention and when he got closer, the Lord spoke out of the bush commissioning him to bring deliverance to the slaves in Egypt. But he made an excuse!

“Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?” (Ex. 3:11).

Surely he should have known, witnessing the miracle of the burning bush, and hearing God’s voice, that God would make a way. But he was human.

He no doubt remembered how 40 years before he had actually tried to be a deliverer, but failed. At that time, he defended an Israelite, and killed an Egyptian, “*for* he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by *his* hand would deliver them: but they understood not” (Acts 7:25). Moses was ready *then* to bring deliverance; but the people did not accept him.

Being wanted for murder, he fled as a fugitive to the backside of the desert. Had there been a Post Office in Egypt, his picture would have been on the bulletin board with the “most wanted criminals.” Imagine getting

a call to go back to the very area where one had committed murder!

To deliver this multitude of slaves from Egypt would require a miracle ministry greater than any he had ever dared to dream of. To get his message across to these people would be no easy task, and to get them to believe in him might be even more difficult. He had been rejected before—would they accept him now? Besides he was eighty years old—they would probably figure he was senile—even hearing “voices” talking to him. At eighty he was “too old for the young people.”

But even if he succeeded in getting all of these slaves out of Egypt, what then? When they would face a large body of water standing in their way, there would be no Golden Gate suspension bridge or ships waiting to take them across! Those waters would need to swing open on the hinges of omnipotent power and the paths of men be laid in the depths of the sea. They would need a miracle cloud to guide them by day and a pillar of fire by night; they would need a miracle of manna from heaven and water from a rock in that desert! Who had ever dreamed of such things? There was nothing like this in the bylaws of his denomination. No wonder he said: “Who am I?”

“But who will I say sent me?” Moses asked. God said: “I AM THAT I AM” (Ex. 3:14). What a thrilling name! Surely, what God used to be, he is now; what he is now, he always will be—“the same yesterday, and today, and forever” (Heb. 13:8). Some are prone to think of him as the great “I used to be,” as though his power was exhausted on some former generation; or they think of him as the great “I will be” in some future Heaven or Golden Age. But he is in the NOW, the great I AM. He was God, not only of Abraham, but of Isaac, and later of Jacob—and now of Moses! People pass on, centuries pile on centuries, but he is the *same* (Heb. 1:12). Moses had another excuse:

“O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since you have spoken unto your servant: but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue” (Ex. 4:10).

Because Moses was such a champion of faith, because he is so famous, we sometimes tend to forget that he was not an outstanding

speaker. Being slow of speech, by natural reasoning, was a “good” excuse.

Finally, he quit making excuses. Though he was eighty years old, it was not time to “retire,” it was time to “RE-FIRE.” He who had been a nobody on the back side of the desert went from ZERO to HERO as the Exodus became a reality!

But all was not smooth sailing even then. A few weeks later, while Moses sought God on the mountain, the people fell into idolatry in the valley below (Ex. 32). They demanded of Aaron a god they could see. Then, having made a golden calf, “they sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play,” and while “naked” took part in pagan fertility rites (verses 4, 25).

When Moses returned from the mountain, with the tables of the Ten Commandments in his hand, he confronted Aaron, the man left in charge, about the golden calf. Aaron could not deny its existence, but notice the excuse he made:

“And I said unto them, Whosoever hath any gold, let them break it off. So they gave it me: then I cast it into the fire, and *there came out this calf*!” (Exod. 32:24).

*What?* Aaron talks as though the golden calf was an unexplainable phenomenon! A surprise! But the fact is, he “fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf” (verse 4)—*it did not just happen!*

Tabloid papers commonly feature bizarre headlines:

**NOAH’S ARK RECENTLY FOUND  
IN PENNSYLVANIA!**

**NIXON WAS PREPARING ELVIS  
TO BE THE NEXT PRESIDENT!**

**NINETY-EIGHT YEAR OLD WOMAN  
GIVES BIRTH TO BABY WITH  
THREE HEADS!**

Aaron’s excuse, if taken seriously, would have ranked right up there with the rest of them:

**THOUSANDS WITNESS INCREDIBLE  
CALF-LIKE CREATURE MIRACULOUSLY  
EMERGE FROM BURNING FIRE!**

At still another period in Israel’s history, the people were in bondage—and again God raised up a deliverer: Gideon. When we think of Gideon, we usually recall how he was one of those faith heroes who subdued kingdoms

and turned to flight the armies of the aliens (Heb. 11:32). We do not think of him as an excuse maker, but he was.

The Midianites had taken away their crops and possessions. They were all oppressed, frustrated, and fearful—Gideon included. One day while Gideon was fearfully threshing wheat by a winepress, a man sitting under a nearby oak tree spoke to him: “The Lord is with you mighty man of valor”! (Jud. 13:12). Gideon might have said: “*Who me?*”

Gideon wanted to know something—if the Lord was with them, why were they in this trouble? Why were they not seeing miracles, as when God brought the Israelites out of Egypt? He did not realize, apparently, that a miracle was taking place then and there—that this “man” who was talking to him was actually an *angel* from the courts of God!

The angel’s message was that the Lord wanted Gideon to deliver the people from the Midianite bondage. At first Gideon made an excuse:

“Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father’s house” (Jud. 6:15).

We might have sympathized with Gideon. If he was a nobody, if he was poor, if he had no social standing, if he was not well-known—how *would* he bring deliverance to the people? Finally he quit saying “I can’t,” and started saying, “I can,” and the rest is now history.

The last letters in the word American are “I can.” Paul put it this way: “I CAN do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13). “For it is GOD who works in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13). “The people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits” (Dan. 11:32). In ourselves we are nothing; but through *him* “we are MORE THAN CONQUERORS” (Rom. 8:37).

God says you can; Satan says you can’t. The way *you* vote makes a majority. Jesus said: “The thief comes but for to steal to kill and to destroy; I am come that you might have life and have it more abundantly” (John 10:10).

When God called Jeremiah to do a work for him, his excuse was that he was too young!

“Ah, Lord God! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child” (Jer. 1:6).

Again, this seemed like a “good” excuse.

But, nevertheless, he did speak; and became one of the most famous prophets that ever lived. His writings make up the second longest book in the Bible, having 42,659 words, second only to the Psalms with 43,743 words.

On a personal note, I thank God that from my youth I have had the opportunity to preach the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, having been in his work full time since age 18! Can God use young people? Certainly. Timothy was a young preacher (1 Tim. 4:12) and even Paul—though we commonly think of him as Paul “the aged” (Philm. 9)—had his life turned around while still a “young man” (Acts 7:58).

The child Samuel heard the Lord’s voice when the old man, Eli, no longer heard the voice of God (1 Sam. 2:1-10). David’s older brothers were passed over and the young David became the Lord’s choice (1 Sam. 16:11).

Jesus called a little child to him as an object lesson, and said: “Except you be converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 18:3). When children were crying out words of praise, “Hosanna to the son of David,” some of the Jewish priests were upset. Jesus asked them if they had never read: “Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings you have perfected praise”? (Matt. 21:15,16). And if we want to get younger still, how about this: John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother’s womb! (Lk. 1:15).

It has been said that the young people are the church of tomorrow. But the young people are an important part of the church *today!* A good church reaches out to people of all ages and, ideally, will have people of all different ages—including children and young people. No one is too young or too old to be used of God, since the outpouring of the Holy Spirit includes all—young and old, male and female, rich and poor (Acts 2:17,18).

A common excuse today is: “I’m too busy!” People claim they are too busy to pray each day, too busy to read the Bible, yet somehow they find time to do other things. A poem I first read back in the 1950s (author unknown) provides some valid admonition: *You’ve time to build houses, and in them to dwell,*

*And time to do business—to buy and to sell,  
But none for repentance, or deep earnest prayer;*

*To seek your salvation you've no time to spare.*

*You've time for earth's pleasures, frolic and fun,  
For her glittering treasures how quickly you run,  
But care not to seek the fair mansions above,  
The favor of God or the gift of his love.*

*You've time to take voyages over the sea,  
And time to take in the world's jubilee;  
But soon your hopes will be lost in the gloom,  
Of the cold, dark wave of death and the tomb.*

*You've time to resort to mountain and glen,  
Time to gain knowledge from books and of men,*

*Yet no time to search for the wisdom of God:  
But what of your soul when you're under the sod?*

*For time will not linger when helpless you lie,  
Staring death in the face, you will take time to die!*

*Then, what of the judgment?*

*Pause, think, I implore!*

*For time will be lost on eternity's shore.*

In one of his parables, Jesus told of a man who prepared a great supper and invited many guests, but they all claimed to be busy with other things:

“They all with one consent began to make *excuse*. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I need to go and see it: I ask that you have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I ask you to have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come” (Lk. 14:18-20).

One questions why a man would buy a piece of property sight unseen. Another was concerned about his purchase of cattle. The man who had just gotten married was leaving on his honeymoon! If these were true statements, they were pretty “good” excuses. But even good excuses do not change God’s plan. They rob us of God’s best in our lives.

A man once came to Jesus and said he would follow him anywhere! He saw the miracles of Jesus, the crowds, the glamor of it all. He wanted to join the team. But when Jesus said to him: “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head,” we hear no more from this man! (Lk. 7:57.58). So often people want the crown, but not the cross. They like the promises, but not the commandments.

One man said, “When I find the perfect church, I’ll join it!” Someone else spoke up: “Better not do that—if *you* join it, IT WILL

NOT BE PERFECT ANYMORE!”

“Let us hold fast the profession of our faith...NOT forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, *as the manner of some is*; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as you see the day approaching” (Heb. 10:23-25).

Those who failed to assemble together with believers were not unsaved people, or pagans, or atheists—none of which would be expected to attend services anyhow. Those who had this “manner” or custom, were professing believers in Christ. But, probably, because of some doctrinal disagreement, they felt justified in staying home. Perhaps their excuse was that they wanted a perfect church, and not finding it, like some today, attended no church at all!

While living at Nazareth, Jesus “...*as his custom was*, went into the synagogue on the sabbath day” (Lk. 4:16). This does not imply that the synagogue was perfect or that people there understood all doctrines perfectly. Nevertheless, at Nazareth this was a center for the worship of God—and Jesus was a part of it! He didn’t refuse to attend because the rabbis had less understanding than he did!

Those who make the excuse that they require a perfect church apparently forget that the churches founded by the apostles had their faults and failures also.

At Corinth, some of the members were even denying the resurrection. Having been saved from an ungodly background, some supposed celibacy was God’s requirement. There was carnality, envy, strife, and divisions—some saying, “I am of Paul,” and others, “I am of Apollos.” Services were disorderly and lacked structure. Gifts of the Holy Spirit, such as speaking in tongues and prophecy, were being misused and abused. Paul’s writing of the “Love Chapter” implies there was weakness in this area. Their communion service had become a mere supper, with the rich having much and the poor being shamed. One of their members was involved in incest.

Quite a church! Yet—and this is our point—this was “*the church of God at Corinth*.” Had we lived in Corinth at the time, we could have given a lot of good excuses for not attending this church!

While the *ideal* is that we all see “eye to eye” (Isa. 51:8) and all “speak the same thing” (1 Cor. 1:10), yet the New Testament allows room for certain differences of understanding as we grow in Christ (Rom. 14).

We must keep in mind that truth is vast; it is not limited to a few points of doctrine. No one person has all the truth or every divine gift. The Holy Spirit divides these to every member of the body of Christ as *he* wills (1 Cor 12:11-17). It ends up *we all need each other*.

No man is an island. An arrogant, know-it-all attitude short-circuits the flow of God’s Holy Spirit in our lives. As the Psalmist, we should pray, “Renew a *right* spirit within me” (Psa. 51:10).

A person who can’t fit in with any church, who supposes that he *alone* has all the truth, is like the man who said: “Every one is wrong except you and me, and sometimes I wonder about thee!”

I am not saying to just attend *any* church. I am not recommending fellowship with cults and extremist groups that shame the gospel. One should seek to find a church that comes the closest to what he believes the Bible teaches, one that is being blessed by God in a community, one that is victorious and loving, one with Spirit!

People have offered all kinds of excuses. Some who are not serving the Lord make the excuse that they do not understand God or the Bible. Well, I don’t understand how a brown cow, who sleeps in a red barn, and eats green grass, can produce white milk and yellow butter! But it happens.

To receive salvation does not require that we understand God or be able to explain everything in his Word. The Bible says, “Abraham *believed* God”—it does not say he *understood* God—“and it was counted unto him for righteousness” (Rom. 4:3).

The practice of excuse making began back with Adam and Eve. We have seen it throughout biblical history. We all know it is a common practice today. Ironically, it will not stop with human history, but even at Judgment Day some will even dare to make excuses! We have this on the authority of Jesus himself that many will come on that Day and claim to have done wonderful works, yet to whom he will say: “I never knew you: depart from me, you that work iniquity” (Matt. 7:21-23).

How much better to hear the words: “Well done, good and faithful servant...enter into the joy of thy Lord” (Matt. 25:21)!

—Ralph Woodrow