

SINCERE BUT WRONG—DEAD WRONG**THE PLEASANT VIEW PLUMB LINE**

John Wayne “Punkin” Brown, Jr. was a preacher for a “Pentecostal” type church. He’s now dead. He still would be alive but for the fact that he believed false doctrine.

Before his ascension back into heaven, Jesus commissioned his apostles to preach the gospel to the whole creation. In connection therewith, the Lord promised he would confirm the validity of their message by giving them the ability to perform different kinds of miracles.

One of these “signs” was: “They shall take up serpents” (Mark 16:18). In another text Christ said: “I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions” (Luke 10:19).

A striking example of how this promise was fulfilled is found in an incident during the ministry of Paul. When the apostle was en route to Rome as a prisoner for Christ (Acts 27:1ff), his ship was wrecked upon the island of Malta. The inmates of the vessel huddled together on that cold morning and built a fire on the beach. The ever-industrious Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks, when he started to put them on the flames, a poisonous viper slithered out and fastened on the apostle’s hand.

The observers thought Paul soon would be dead, amazingly, he suffered no harm at all. His hand did not even swell (28:5-6) - as confirmed by Luke, the physician (Colossians 4:14). This sign demonstrated that the gospel Paul preached was indeed true.

What many do not understand is this: those miraculous signs **were confined to the first century**. They were temporary gifts, given as the New Testament documents were being prepared over a span of about fifty years.

Paul himself plainly taught that these miraculous signs would come to an end when the revelation process was made “complete” (see 1 Corinthians 13:8-10). As the apostolic age faded, so did the supernatural gifts.

Our Pentecostal friends believe that those miracle-working abilities continue even to this day. And some of them, particularly in the region of the southern Appalachian mountains, practice “snake-handling” in their religious services. The movement had its origin in about 1910, and has been the subject of numerous studies and television specials.

“Punkin” Brown was one of the leading practitioners of this movement. **But not any more**. He is dead at the age of thirty-four. Brown, the father of five children, was handling a three foot timber rattler during one of his services on Saturday, October 3, 1998. The snake bit him on the finger, and within ten minutes he was dead.

This tragedy is compounded by the fact that Brown was a widower. His wife, Melinda, died three years earlier when she was bitten by a rattler in the “Full Gospel Tabernacle in Jesus Name Church” in Middlesboro, Kentucky. Now, five children have neither a mom nor dad—simply because their parents, who obviously were quite sincere, believed the false doctrine that miracles (e.g., taking up serpents) still prevail today.

Compassionate hearts grieve for this family. In spite of that, a teacher of truth has the obligation to highlight the utter fanaticism characteristic of these people. Why can’t folks see the error in this deadly practice?

According to newspaper accounts, one fang of the snake pierced Brown’s finger.

“...then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel...” (Amos 7:8)

WHY I AM HAPPY TO BE A CHRISTIAN

Text: _____

I. _____

Notes:

II. _____

Notes:

III. _____

Notes:

PRAYER—A HEAVENLY AVENUE

Text: _____

I. _____

Notes:

II. _____

Notes:

III. _____

Notes:

Within moments he toppled over. Why was he so affected? Because he did **not** have the “take-up-serpents” sign.

Interestingly, one of the first reactions of someone in the congregation was to call 911. Why did they not just pray for him, and heal the gentleman? “Healing” is listed in the same passage that mentions taking up serpents. The answer is all too obvious. They did not have that power either.

Moreover, once Mr. Brown expired, why did not someone in the congregation raise him from the dead? Raising the dead was also a first-century sign (see Matthew 10:8; Acts 9:36-42; 20:9-10). They **could not** raise the victim from the dead!

As sad as this episode is, it illustrates how utterly deceived a person can be. Example after example of fatalities in connection with these snake-handling services can be cited, but these poor people continue to practice this bizarre religion. Some folks, under the sway of religious dogma, appear to lose the basic ability to reason correctly.

Too, this case graphically illustrates the fact that sincerity in religion doesn’t count for anything—unless it is coupled with **truth**. Mr. and Mrs. Brown were obviously sincere, but they were wrong. Now they are dead—dead wrong!

Every person needs to examine his religious beliefs in order to determine whether or not they conform to the New Testament. Just as sincerity does not negate natural law, neither does it cancel spiritual law. Sincerity is to be applauded as a personal trait, but if it is coupled with error, it can be deadly.

Source/Footnotes

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-Wayne Jackson

TOUGH SERVICE

One Sunday morning, the preacher noticed little Alex standing in the church foyer staring up at a large plaque. It was covered with names and had small flags mounted on either side of it. The preacher walked over, stood beside the boy, and said quietly, “Good morning, Alex.”

“Good morning, Preacher,” he replied, still focused on the plaque.

“Preacher, what is this?”

“Well son, it’s a memorial to all the young men and women who died in the service.” Soberly, they just stood together, staring at the large plaque. Finally, little Alex’s voice, barely audible and trembling with fear asked, “Which service...the 9:30 or the 10:30?”

(I was unable to get to the material I was going to present on this for our Wednesday night class, but having come across this article I thought it would be a good substitute to conclude our discussion on the all-powerful nature of God.—Andy)

THINGS GOD CANNOT DO

Both Christians and atheists generally have assumed that if the God depicted in the Bible exists, He can do **anything**—since He is represented as being all-powerful. However, this assumption is incorrect. The Bible does not claim that the omnipotence of God implies that He can do anything and everything. In reality, “omnipotence” does not, and cannot, apply to that which does not lend itself to power. Skeptics and atheists have posed queries that they feel nullify the notion of omnipotence, thereby demonstrating the nonexistence of God. For example, “Can God create a boulder so large that He, Himself, cannot lift it?”

Separate and apart from the fact that God is not, Himself, physical, and that He created the entire physical Universe, though He is metaphysical and transcendent of the Universe, the question is a **conceptual absurdity**. It’s like asking, “Can God create a round square or a four-sided triangle?” No, He cannot—but not for the reasons implied by the atheist: that He does not exist or that He is not omnipotent. Rather, it is because the question is, itself, **self-contradictory and incoherent**. It is nonsensical terminology. Rather, than saying God **cannot** do such things, it would be more in harmony with the truth to say simply that such things **cannot be done at all!** God is infinite in power, but power meaningfully relates only to what can be done, to what is **possible** of accomplishment—**not** to what is **impossible!** It is absurd to speak of any power (even **infinite** power) being able to do what simply **cannot** be done. Logical absurdities do not lend themselves to being accomplished, and so, **are not subject to power**, not even to **infinite** power (see warren, 1972, pp. 27ff.).

While God **can** do whatever is **possible** to be done, in reality, He **will** do only what is in harmony with **His** nature. Further, to suggest that God is deficient or limited in power if He cannot create a rock so large that He cannot lift, is to imply that He **could** do so if He simply had **more** power. But this is false. Creating a rock that He, himself, cannot lift, or creating a four-sided triangle, or making a ball that is at the same time both white all over and black all over, or creating a ninety-year-old teenager, or making a car that is larger on the inside than it is on the outside—to propose such things is to affirm logical contradictions and absurdities. Such propositions do not really say anything at all. Though one can imagine logical absurdities that cannot be accomplished, they do not constitute a telling blow against the view that God is infinite in power.

So, no, the concept of “omnipotence” does not mean that there are no limits to what an omnipotent being can do. In fact, the Bible pinpoints specific things that God **cannot** do. For example, the Bible states unequivocally that God cannot lie (Num. 23:19; 1 Sam 15:29; 2 Tim 2:13; Titus 1:2). He is a Being whose very essence entails truthfulness. Falsehood is completely out of harmony with His divine nature. Further, God cannot be tempted by evil (Jam. 1:13).

Another impossibility pertaining to God’s power is the fact that He shows no partiality or favoritism (Deu. 10:17; Rom. 2:11; Col. 3:25; 1 Pet. 1:17). He is “open and above board”—evenhanded—with all His creatures. He can be counted on to interact with human beings as He said He would. His treatment of us centers on our own self-chosen behavior—not on our ethnicity or skin color (Acts 10:34-35; 1 Sam. 16:7).

A third instance that qualifies the meaning of “omnipotent” is seen in God’s inability to forgive the individual who will not repent and forsake his or her sin (Josh. 24: 19; Pro. 28:13; Mat. 6:15; 18:35; Luke 13:3,5). As great and as magnificent as the mercy and forgiveness of God are, it is impossible to bestow forgiveness upon the person who does not seek that forgiveness through any other avenue than the blood of Jesus and obedience to the Gospel of Christ (Rom. 1:16; 2:8; 2 Thes. 1:8; 1 Pet. 4:17).

The more one studies the Bible, examining the attributes and characteristics of the God depicted there, the more one is struck with (1) the inspiration of the Bible—since its skillful handling of such matters places it beyond the charge of successful contradiction, and (2) awe at the infinitude of God. Not one of the factors discussed in this article reflects adversely upon the reality of God’s omnipotence. But it is abundantly clear that a person may so live as to render the God of heaven incapable of coming to that person’s aid. It is imperative that every human being recognizes the need to understand His will and to conform one’s behavior to that will. It is imperative that every individual avoid placing self in the precarious position of being in need of **that which God cannot do**.

-Dave Miller