

HOW TO STAY ON COURSE SPIRITUALLY

12 ¹⁸Then the Sadducees, who say that there is no resurrection, came to [Jesus] and asked him, ¹⁹Teacher, Moses wrote for us, If a man's brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and provide children for his brother. ²⁰Now there were seven brothers. The first married and died without leaving any children; ²¹so the second brother married the widow, but he also died, leaving no child; and the same thing happened with the third. ²²[In fact, none of] the seven left any children. Finally, the woman herself died. ²³In the resurrection, whose wife shall she be, for [each of] the seven [brothers] had her as his wife? ²⁴Jesus said to them, Is it not for this reason that you are in error, [namely,] because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God? ²⁵When they shall rise from the dead, they shall neither marry nor be given in marriage; rather, they shall be like the angels in heaven. ²⁶But with regard to the dead—that they are raised; have you not read in the book of Moses, in [the passage about] the Bush, how God spoke to him, saying, I [am] the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? ²⁷He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are greatly mistaken. (Mk. 12:18-27)

Introduction

Doug Corrigan loved airplanes and he loved to fly. As a matter of fact, he was so much in love with aviation that he went out and bought his own plane. He bought a used “junker” for \$300 and modified it for long distance flights. Once he got it airborne, he flew it all the way from his home in Long Beach, California, to New York.

His desire was to fly his plane across the Atlantic to Europe. But when federal officials in New York inspected his dilapidated aircraft, they refused to grant permission for a non-stop trans-Atlantic flight; it was too risky, especially with the additional quantity of fuel that would be necessary. So Doug agreed to take his plane back home to California.

But shortly after take off from a New York airfield, Doug's plane made a 180 degree turn and headed east out over the Atlantic! Twenty-eight hours later, Doug and his dilapidated plane touched down in Ireland.

When interviewed, the straight-faced pilot said with a twinkle in his eye, “I guess my compass froze. I guess I flew the wrong way.” Ever since that day in July of 1938, Doug became known as “Wrong Way” Corrigan. (*Time*, 12/25/95, p. 47; *The Sheboygan Press*, 12/13/95)

“Wrong Way” Corrigan got off course and wound up going in the opposite direction.

In the passage of Scripture presently before us, the Lord Jesus accuses the Sadducees of “getting off course:” *“Is it not for this reason that you are in error, [namely,] because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God?”* (Mk.

12:24.) The Greek term, πλανῶ, translated “to be in error,” has the meaning “to go astray,” or “to stray off course.”

As we study this passage of the Gospel of Mark, let us consider what we must do to stay on course spiritually.

I. To Stay on Course Spiritually, Become Better Acquainted with the Scriptures (Mk. 12:26-27)

In response to their inquiry, the Lord Jesus directs the Sadducees to Exodus 3:6 and offers that passage as proof of the resurrection:

But with regard to the dead—that they are raised; have you not read in the book of Moses, in [the passage] about the Bush, how God spoke to him, saying, I [am] the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? ²⁷He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are greatly mistaken. (Mk. 12:26-27)

How does this passage of Exodus 3:6 testify to the resurrection? Many biblical “scholars” deny that this passage of Scripture has any relationship to the resurrection of the dead; at least they cannot discern any connection, (so reports Dr. William L. Lane, in *The New International Commentary, The Gospel of Mark*, p. 428.)

To understand and appreciate how this passage of Exodus does testify to the resurrection, we need to have a good acquaintance with the Scriptures. First, we need to understand the Scriptural teaching on the creation of man. According to Genesis 1:26-27, man was created in the image of God: *“Then God said, Let us make man in our image, in our likeness ... ²⁷So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”* Furthermore, according to Genesis 2:7, man was formed from the dust of the ground: *“Jehovah God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.”* Thus man is a unity of soul and body—these two elements together (soul and body) are what constitute a man.

Next, we need to understand the Scriptural teaching on death. The separation of the body and the soul, and the subsequent dissolution of the body, are unnatural; this is the consequence and the outworking of the curse pronounced upon man because of his sin. Following Adam’s act of sin, the LORD pronounced the following curse upon the man: *“By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return”* (Gen. 3:19.)

Furthermore, we must consider Exodus 3:6 in this Scriptural setting: *“I AM the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.”* The present tense (“I AM the God of Abraham, ...”) indicates that the LORD has a **continuing** relationship with these patriarchs. Even though they had died centuries before Moses, His

relationship with them is still in effect, it has not been terminated. The declaration, *"I AM the God of Abraham ... ,"* indicates that the LORD has a **continuing covenantal relationship** with these patriarchs. To be their God means to be their Protector, their Provider, their Redeemer; note Genesis 15:1, where the LORD assures Abram, *"Fear not, Abram. I am your shield, and your exceedingly great reward."* As their God, the LORD will surely deliver them from the curse and from all its consequences, and finally bring them into a complete state of redemption—which necessarily means the resurrection of their bodies, because of the biblical doctrine of creation and of the curse as previously outlined.

When we have an acquaintance with the Scriptures we can appreciate the conclusion Jesus draws from this passage of Exodus: *"God is not the God of the dead, but of the living."* *"The God of the dead"* is a complete contradiction. Death is separation from God; death is being given over to the divine curse upon sinful man; being consigned to death is God's declaration, "I AM no longer your God." The declaration, *"I AM your God,"* means "I will protect you and deliver you from all the effects of the curse, and bestow upon you the fullness of My blessing." The fullness of the LORD's blessing at the very least is the state described in Genesis 3:8. That passage of Genesis 3:8 describes the LORD walking together with Adam and Eve in a physical paradise: *"And they heard the voice of Jehovah God walking in the garden in the cool of the day."*

To stay on course spiritually, let us become better acquainted with the Scriptures. We must read the Scriptures, all of Scripture, appreciating the testimony of the Apostle Paul with regard to the Scriptures: *"All Scripture is breathed out by God and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, ¹⁷so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work"* (2 Tim.3:16-17.)

Then, too, we must use the Scriptures as our "spiritual touchstone" and compass and anchor. A touchstone was a hard black stone used to test the quality of gold or silver. likewise, the Scriptures should be our "touchstone" by which we test the truth and worthiness of ideas, opinions, and counsel that are presented to us. We should imitate the Bereans, *"Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true"* (Acts 17:11.) The Apostle John exhorts us, *"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world"* (1 Jn. 4:1.) The Scriptures become the "touchstone" by which we *"test the spirits."* We must always ask, "How does this particular teaching or idea or counsel match up to Scripture? Is it in accordance with Scripture, or does it deviate from Scripture?"

Most of all, we must apply the Scriptures to our lives. We need to imitate the Psalmist who declared, *"I have more insight than all my teachers, because I*

meditate on your statutes. ¹⁰⁰I have more understanding than the elders, because I obey your precepts" (Psl. 119:99-100.)

II. To Stay on Course Spiritually, Always Acknowledge the Power of God (Mk. 12:24)

Our Lord Jesus identifies the Sadducees' problem in these terms: *"You do not know the power of God."*

The Sadducees adamantly denied the possibility of the resurrection, as we are informed in Acts 23:8, *"The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, and that there are neither angels nor spirits."* The Sadducees had a very limited view of the ability of God and of the spiritual realities of the world; they were secularists and materialists. The Sadducees would be in the same category as those to whom the Apostle Paul posed the question, *"Why do you judge it incredible (literally, "unbelievable") if God raises the dead?"* (Acts 26:8.) Note that such people arrogantly assume the role of judge. Using the standard of their limited human ability and comprehension, they dictate what the Almighty God can and cannot do.

Such people refuse to accept God's act of raising the dead as admissible evidence. The Sadducees had no doubt heard of, and some of them may even have been eyewitnesses to, Jesus' act of raising Jairus' daughter; later, our Lord would raise Lazarus. But the fact of the resurrection did not fit their conception of what is possible; therefore, they label it as "unbelievable" and would not allow it to alter their conception of what God may or may not do in His world. In contrast to such men as the Sadducees and other rationalists, the Apostle Paul demonstrates sound reasoning by acknowledging the almighty power of God and accepting the fact that He does work in His world in the way He sees fit to accomplish His divine purposes.

We may subtly entertain a more "orthodox" version of the same view as that held by the Sadducees when we seek to confine God to the Scriptures; maintaining that He used to do great things back in biblical times, but He does not and cannot do any of those kind of things today.

If we adopt the view of the Sadducees—entertaining a very limited, defective view of the power of God and His willingness to employ that awesome power—consider what affect that will have upon our own spiritual life and the life of the church. First, it will shut us off from the working of Christ, as was the case of those people from Jesus' home town mentioned in Mark 6:5-6, *"He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. 'And he was amazed at their lack of faith."* Second, it will shut us off from beholding the glory of God and receiving His blessing. The Lord Jesus informed Martha, as they stood at the tomb of her brother Lazarus, *"Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?"* (Jn. 11:40.)

To stay on course spiritually, let us always acknowledge the power of God. The prophet Jeremiah provides a model of prayer: *“Ah, Sovereign LORD, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for you”* (Jer. 32:17.) The Old Testament patriarch Abraham provides a model of true faith; consider the Apostle Paul’s commentary on Abraham’s faith in the LORD’s promise that He would bless Abraham and Sarah with a son of their own even at their advanced age:

[Despite all the obstacles standing] against hope, [Abram] believed with hope, so that he might become a father of many nations, just as it had been spoken to him, “So shall your offspring be.” ¹⁹And without becoming weak in faith, he acknowledged that his own body was now as good as dead (he being about a hundred years old), and [he acknowledged] the barrenness of Sarah’s womb. ²⁰Nevertheless, looking to the promise of God, he did not waver through unbelief, but grew strong through faith, [thereby] giving glory to God, ²¹being fully persuaded that what [God] had promised, he was also able to fulfill. (Rom. 4:18-21)

Can we identify an area of our lives in which we need to acknowledge the power of God and pray that God would exert His divine power on our behalf and for His glory?

Conclusion

When “Wrong Way” Corrigan strayed off course it was something of a lark and an adventure—he ended up becoming a celebrity, even starring in a Hollywood movie about his life! But it is a serious thing to stray off course with regard to our spiritual life and our eternal destiny.

To safeguard against straying off course spiritually, let us heed the counsel of our Lord Jesus Christ *“Is it not for this reason that you are in error, [namely,] because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God?”* To avoid straying off course spiritually, let us seek to become better acquainted with the Scriptures and let us always acknowledge the power of God and never discount His awesome divine power.