

# Presumption And Divine Justice

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*Forerunner*, "Personal," July 2005

King David specifically requests of God in Psalm 19:13, "Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, and I shall be innocent of great transgression."

The *Reader's Digest Great Encyclopedic Dictionary* defines *presumptuous* as "unduly bold, audacious, and arrogant." *Strong's Concordance* also defines the corresponding Hebrew word as "arrogant." *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* defines the root word, *presume*, as "to undertake without leave or clear justification." The word identifies acts done in domineering, haughty insolence with a scornful, contemptuous disdain for respect, convention, and even law. It is the opposite of "humble," "modest," and "unassuming." In a religious context, it can be said that presumption is taking unorthodoxy to its extreme.

Over the past sixty or seventy years, as we have approached the return of Jesus Christ, it seems that orthodoxy in virtually every aspect of life has been discarded. Whether in dress, cosmetics, jewelry, movies, music, dancing, language, marriage, and religion, what was once considered normal has been rejected by the *avant garde* leadership and quickly followed by the masses. It is this author's opinion that these departures have not advanced the quality of life in the United States.

It has always been this way in mankind's relationship with his Creator. God established the standard of orthodoxy in the Garden of Eden, saying to Adam and Eve that they could eat of all the trees of the garden but one. It took apparently minimal effort by the most unorthodox being in all creation to persuade them to take to themselves the right to change the orthodoxy God established by eating of the very tree they were told not to eat. They did this even though they could see God face to face!

This episode is a good indicator of how powerfully perverse human nature is. This is why Jeremiah laments, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" (Jeremiah 17:9). Nothing in this regard has changed since Adam and Eve; human nature is just as strong in asserting itself to control life as it has always been.

How many people even in the Israelitish nations are aware of what Deuteronomy 12:32 so plainly states? "Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it." Just in case we missed it, God gives us a similar admonition within a few verses of the end of the Book:

For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in the book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book. (Revelation 22:18-19)

These are strong warnings!

Mankind has an innate desire to worship God, but he wants to be free to do it according to the dictates of his own mind. The result is a wide variety of religions—in actuality, mass confusion as to which is the true religion—and a world in which true values are lost in an ocean of conflicting opinions about how to live. This, in turn, has helped persuade many people to reach the conclusion that all gods are equally good, or its counterpart, that everybody is worshipping the same god.

We all know God is not pleased with this situation, but He allows it to continue. However, even while allowing it to continue, He is calling people out of it. He has shown His called-out ones that they have been redeemed from the bondage to traditions, described in I Peter 1:18 as "vain," "aimless," or "futile," depending on the translation. However, in the vast majority of cases, someone, presumptuously taking it upon himself to inaugurate a tradition, began practicing them, sincerely thinking he was improving his life. We have all followed these traditions, but the Christian is responsible not to allow the world to squeeze him into its mold of conduct, character, and attitude.

Proverbs 21:16 describes the way many presumptuous sins begin: "A man who wanders from the way of understanding will rest in the congregation of the dead." Like this man, most people do not deliberately set out to depart from God. Nevertheless, carelessness invariably enters the picture, and a person drifts from his former sure fix on his goal. Once his focus on the goal is blurred, he is more easily deceived into foolishly assuming certain things. An especially sad part of this is that the result is the same as if he were deliberately presumptuous.

The author of Hebrews uses a metaphor in Hebrews 2:1-3, portraying a boat slipping from its moorings and drifting away. A person "neglect[s] so great salvation" by allowing himself to be caught in the current of the world's attitudes and conduct. Presumption frequently begins with careless drifting, but the drifting quickly advances from neglect to presumption unless one carefully checks whether he actually has God's permission to behave as he does.

In Proverbs 8, wisdom is personified as a woman crying out to people along the way—to God's Kingdom?—to take heed to her instruction. In verse 36, she utters a profound warning: "But he who sins against me wrongs his own soul; all those who hate me love death." None of us likes to think of himself as foolishly loving death. However, the Bible consistently shows that those who do not consciously, purposefully, and carefully direct their lives toward obedience to God do indeed love death rather than life! Such a person is in effect presuming that all is well with him in relation to God. God does not like being taken for granted—because it is bad for *us*!

### **An Example from Modern Liberalism**

Not all presumption is careless drifting. Unfortunately, strong evidence exists to show that much of modern liberalism in religion was deliberately planned and executed. *A Layman's Guide to Protestant Theology* by William Hordern, p. 74, refers to this:

The method of liberalism includes the attempt to modernize Christianity. The world, liberals argue, has changed radically since the early creeds of Christendom were formulated; this makes the creeds sound archaic and unreal to modern man. We have to rethink Christianity in thought forms which the modern world can comprehend. Fosdick argued that we must express the essence of Christianity, its "abiding experiences," but that we must not identify these with the "changing categories" in which they have been expressed in the past. For example, says Fosdick, an abiding experience of Christianity

has been its conviction that God will triumph over evil. This has been traditionally pictured in the category of Christ's second coming on the clouds to destroy evil and set up good. We can no longer retain the outworn category, but we can still believe the truth which this ancient thought form was trying to express. We can continue to work in the faith that, through His devoted followers, God is now building His Kingdom and that there will be a renewing of life, individual and social, to bring it into conformity with the will of God. The essence of the faith is thus retained, argues Fosdick, which the thought form in which it was once clothed has been abandoned.

A second aspect of the method of liberalism is its refusal to accept religious belief on authority alone. Instead, it insists that all beliefs must pass the bar of reason and experience. Man's mind is capable of thinking God's thoughts after Him. Man's intuitions and reason are the best clues that we have to the nature of God. The mind must be kept open to all truth regardless of from whence it comes. This means that the liberal must have an open mind; no questions are closed. New facts may change the convictions that have become hallowed by custom and time. The liberal will venture forth into the unknown, firmly believing that all truth must be God's truth. In this spirit, the liberal accepts the higher criticism of the Bible and the theory of evolution. He refuses to have a religion that is afraid of truth or that tries to protect itself from critical examination.

Is it any wonder, when those who are supposed to be the primary protectors of religious purity think the way they do, that the laity behaves as they do? Does it really make any difference? Certainly, because the almighty God on high definitely thinks it makes a difference!

Deuteronomy 12:29-31 emphatically states:

When the Lord your God cuts off from before you the nations which you go to dispossess, and you displace them and dwell in their land, take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, 'How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.' You shall not worship the Lord your God in that way; for every abomination to the Lord which He hates they have done to their gods; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods.

### **Christmas, Easter, Ecumenism, and Sunday**

Hardly anything more clearly illustrates the self-deceived perverseness of human nature as its presumptuous additions of the observation of Christmas and Easter to the worship of the God of the Bible. That Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea is indisputable, but among other things, He was not born on December 25, nor did anybody exchange gifts on that date. Scripture nowhere says there were three wise men, and it is clear they gave gifts only to Christ as King.

Regarding Easter, Jesus was not resurrected on a Sunday morning, nor was He crucified on a Friday afternoon. It is impossible to squeeze three days and three nights, which Jesus Himself said would be the length of time He would spend in the tomb (Matthew 12:40), between Friday afternoon and Sunday morning. Even so, fantastically detailed and emotionally appealing traditions have presumptuously been built around both these events and have been taught to a deceived public as though they were true.

Beyond what has been already mentioned regarding these days, where in God's Word does He command that we believe and do these commonly accepted practices? Men have presumptuously taken them upon themselves.

The addition of Christmas and Easter to Christianity happened so long ago that they have come to be accepted as part of the Christian religion, and most people celebrate them without thought. Nevertheless, adding to so-called Christian beliefs has not ended—in fact, it is still happening.

The late Pope John Paul II was an ardent ecumenist. He circled the globe many times in his travels and embraced in conference many non-Catholics in his effort to bring all into one fold. His successor, Pope Benedict XVI, has pledged to continue that effort. In this past month, their representatives achieved a decisive victory in forging a much closer alliance with the Anglican Church. However, Anglican leaders could take this step only by abandoning the firm foundation of a former doctrine and thus joining Catholics in accepting a presumptuous addition that the latter already believe.

A headline in the *Seattle Post Intelligencer*, May 17, 2005, reads, "Catholics, Anglicans reach accord on Mary: Statement closes big gap between churches." The article explains:

The historical separation between Roman Catholics and Anglicans has narrowed after both found common ground on the position of Mary, mother of Jesus, according to a document conceived at the highest church levels. . . . Anglicans, already close to Catholics because of liturgy and traditions, have moved even closer through their understanding of Mary as outlined in the joint statement, which took five years and an international committee to complete.

Bringing back the departed brethren has been a strong focus of the Catholic Church since the Counter-Reformation that followed the Protestant Reformation, which had dealt Catholicism a powerful blow in the sixteenth century. However, it was not until the "New Age Movement" began in earnest during the mid-1970s—with its strong, insistent call for a paradigm shift toward greater tolerance and radical thinking in religious beliefs and values—that the stage was set for ecumenical efforts to succeed.

The following quotation from the same article publicly undressed, as it were, the Anglican Church:

The document seeks to transcend past controversies on Catholic dogma, including the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption of Mary. While not spelled out specifically in the Bible, such beliefs *can* be interpreted through Scripture, according to the 80-paragraph document.

The result might be an elevation, or at least a heightened acknowledgment, of the place of Mary—particularly for Anglicans, the denomination born in England during the Reformation and called the Episcopal Church in the United States.

Anglicanism is considered closest to Catholicism because it gives Mary a pre-eminent place among the saints, includes her in Communion prayers and holds six Marian feast days.

Among other matters, Catholics and Protestants disagree over the Catholic dogmas of the Immaculate Conception—the assertion that Mary lived a life free from sin from the

moment she was conceived—and the Assumption, the belief that her body and soul were taken into heaven when her earthly life ended.

Those dogmas have "created problems not only for Anglicans but also for other Christians," the document said, largely because they are not explicitly supported by Scripture.

But those dogmas also "can be said to be consonant with the teaching of the Scriptures and the *ancient common traditions* ," said the document, titled "Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ." (emphasis added)

How can either of these two doctrines be biblically derived? They cannot! The Catholic Church has long acknowledged that the role they give Mary cannot be supported by Scripture alone, so now both the Catholic and Anglican churches have admitted through the publication of this document that these teachings are based upon mere human tradition.

In the distant past, someone decided that honoring Mary in this way would be "nice," or perhaps he used the word "appropriate," because she was chosen by God to bear His Son in her womb, and besides, she seems to be such a good woman. However, the Scriptures call for no such elevation in status, and they certainly never claim that she lived a perfect, sinless life! Now the Roman Catholic Church has gone so far as to claim she is co-savior with Christ!

Such presumption seems beyond the bounds of honest, spiritual reasoning, but the Catholic Church has similarly declared Sunday to be the day of worship, replacing God's Sabbath. They have published articles openly admitting that, if one uses the Bible alone, then the Sabbath is the only acceptable day of worship. In those same articles, they have also been honest in stating that they have made this change from Sabbath to Sunday on their own authority. On these issues, their presumption is not hidden!

### **In Presumption, Assumption Abounds**

But this is arrogant and bold hubris on a massive scale, enabled only because Satan has managed to deceive the whole world (Revelation 12:9). The overwhelming majority of people calling themselves Christian are so unconcerned—that is, tolerant and careless—they live thinking that it does not matter to God.

The church of God has not escaped falling short in this area of sin either. This year, because Passover falls on a weekly Sabbath, there exists a clear difference among church groups in determining which day Pentecost must be observed. This is due to the day Passover falls, affecting the date for the wavesheaf offering and thus the starting date for the fifty-day count to Pentecost. One side must ignore several clear scriptures in Exodus 23, Leviticus 22, and Deuteronomy 12 and make more than a few assumptions to support their contention. The Scriptures reveal that Jesus, the literal fulfillment of the wavesheaf offering, was "waved" before God on the morning following the weekly Sabbath within the Days of Unleavened Bread, which is exactly what Leviticus 23:10-11 commands.

At times, the line between assuming and presuming is so thin that they are indistinguishable. There is no doubt that an assumption is frequently the foundation for presumption. The *Reader's Digest Great Encyclopedic Dictionary* gives "to take for granted" and "to arrogate to oneself" as definitions for *assume*. It then proceeds to provide "presumption" and "arrogance" as definitions for *assumption*.

A great deal of assuming is being done in the world of Christianity. Many in the world assume that God's law is "done away" and that, once one has accepted the blood of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, salvation is absolutely assured. They add to these wrong conceptions another assumption: that, somehow, meeting God's requirement of living sinlessly, of not breaking His law, is "working for salvation."

It has never been adequately explained to me how meeting God's requirement of glorifying Him by growing in the grace and the knowledge of Jesus Christ and overcoming and living life as closely as we can to the way Jesus did are working for salvation. How can one work for the grace that is already freely given? This presumption can easily lead one with this belief to play fast and loose with sin—the very factor that caused them to need forgiveness in the first place!—through carelessly breaking God's law.

Salvation is indeed assured, but a person must still meet certain conditions established by God. Colossians 1:21-23 provides us with an example:

And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and irreproachable in His sight—if *indeed you continue* in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister. (emphasis added)

Members of the church of God generally do not have a problem with that major assumption /presumption, but many seem to have a problem with another. Once they become converted, they believe, they are assured of "going to a place of safety." This especially seems true if they belong to certain organizations that "push" that belief to increase their membership.

God's Word gives no such specific promise. Did God take Jesus to a place of safety when danger from Satan and the world threatened His life? Did He do the same for the apostles? Did He deliver all the prophets that were killed in Jerusalem? Our responsibility is to submit to the will of God come what may, glorifying Him in our response. How do we know precisely, in advance, exactly how God is going to use us? Is this something we can assume?

A clear and hopeful sign is that God shows a pattern in protecting Noah and his family and bringing Lot out of Sodom. Therefore, we can have hope that safety exists. He also promises not to test us above what we are able (I Corinthians 10:13). Nevertheless, a direct promise to every Christian to "escape" is simply not there. It cannot be assumed. Instead, we find generalities, such as is stated in Zephaniah 2:3, "Seek the Lord, all you meek of the earth, who have upheld His justice. Seek righteousness, seek humility: It *may* be that you will be hidden in the day of the Lord's anger" (emphasis added).

The pitfall for us is much the same as for those in the world who are deceived by the once-saved, always-saved doctrine. We, too, can easily take this for granted and relax, rather than zealously seeking to grow and overcome. We must be careful not to allow this to occur.

### **Adding or Subtracting is Serious**

What is so interesting in light of the many examples of presumption available to us on the modern scene is that the words most commonly used in both Old and New Testaments to indicate sin are more specifically defined as "to miss the mark," "to slip," "to fall," or "to wander from the path."

Those definitions at first seem rather innocuous. However, Deuteronomy 12:30-32 warns that to add to God's Word is a snare. Then, Jesus adds to this serious warning that to reject the commandments of God to keep one's own traditions is vanity—it is futile, useless (Mark 7:7-9). Finally, the book of Revelation adds the clincher, saying that anyone who adds to or takes from God's Word will not be in His Kingdom (Revelation 22:18-19). This sounds like serious business!

To add to or to subtract from God's Word is not a light matter. In this form of sin total ignorance plays only a small part; it is sin in which knowledge of righteousness is fully available. Those involved, especially in initiating the presumptions, should have known better than to do what they did. We, the people of God, may find ourselves in this kind of situation.

The examples of presumptuous sin in this article have been drawn from real life, and for the most part, they are the actions of entire organizations. But how about you personally? Are you just "going along" because many others are following the same course, and the conduct of your life has become traditional? Are you guilty of turning aside here and there because you convince yourself it does not matter just this once, that God will understand, even though you know what you are about to do is wrong?

The sacrificial laws cover situations where sins of this sort may be committed. Leviticus 4:2 states, "Speak to the children of Israel saying: 'If a person sins unintentionally against any of the commandments of the Lord in anything which ought not to be done, and does any of them. . . .'"

"Unintentionally [*ignorantly*, KJV]" includes more than one might think at first. It means "wander," "err," "make a mistake," and "go astray," and contains a strong sense of ignorance and even inadvertence. It suggests a lack of deep understanding of the seriousness of the sin involved. In other words, regarding this sin, the person did not know any better. It includes sins done with a degree of consciousness, an awareness of what one is doing—something done willingly out of weakness—but *not* sins done deliberately.

For instance, the Bible clearly differentiates between manslaughter and murder, and the underlying principle revolves around presumption:

And if you sin unintentionally, and do not observe all these commandments which the Lord has spoken to Moses. . . . [T]he person who does anything presumptuously, whether he is native-born or a stranger, that one brings reproach on the Lord, and he shall be cut off from among his people. Because he has despised the word of the Lord, and has broken His commandment, that person shall be completely cut off; his guilt shall be upon him. (Numbers 15:22, 30-31)

Manslaughter is to kill someone accidentally, while murder is to take a life deliberately and willfully. To sin presumptuously is to sin willfully. Those who overstep their bounds and *dare* to act in a disobedient manner commit presumptuous sins such as murder. The New Testament word translated

"presume" can mean "to think," "to suppose," "to deal proudly, defiantly, and recklessly," and "to look down upon." It shows an evil attitude and a twisted thinking process followed by an action one knows full well is absolutely wrong to do.

Does God provide any examples of how He might react to presumptuous sins? He has been quiet for a long time concerning the belligerent way mankind is living in our time. However, a number of times in the past He has reacted with sudden, explosive, and deadly results to those who committed them.

In the next installment, we will look at several vivid examples of those times in both testaments. It would be good for those of us who may have taken God's quietude for granted to remember Jesus' statement about God's judgment: ". . . to whom much is given, from him much will be required" (Luke 12:48).