

the zealots & the followers



To zealots, it's a religion.
To followers, it's a hobby.



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While actively pursuing a rewarding corporate career, my Sunday mornings were invested in teaching Adult Bible classes in church sanctuaries. Over several years, I encountered large numbers of intelligent folk who had (like so many others) abandoned the visible church¹, but still loved The Lord. Most of them appeared to be...well, wandering and wavering in their faith, as if not knowing what to do next. One of my responses to them is documented at <https://www.Link1.info/about-us>.

¹ If you're not yet familiar with that phenomenon, George Barna's 160-page book, Revolution, is a must-read—ISBN: 141433897X. You may even find it in your local public library.

What follows is a true story, except for a name—

“How about joining us for Bible study on Saturday morning?” I asked a corporate management colleague.

“I'd really enjoy that,” Jim replied, “but it would encroach on my other religion.”

“Oh? What's that?” I probed.

“Georgia Football. Saturday is a big day for the Dawgs® and the Jackets®, you know.”

I understood. Though not personally a sports fan, most of my friends were passionate about sports.

I was unable to shake Jim's characterization of football as “my other religion” for weeks! Had he unwittingly disclosed more fact than fantasy? If he did have two religions, how did they compare? Might an objective analysis reveal strong contrasts? I reflected frequently on those questions. Having initially perceived the need for some definitions, I soon confirmed a long-held suspicion that the word “fan” is short for “fanatic.” A strong synonym for fanatic is “zealot” and that reminded me of something the apostle, Paul, wrote:

> “...for I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge.” —Romans 10:2

It had always appeared to me that Jim was passionate about UGA sports and about his evangelical faith. But I couldn't resist the urge to analyze and compare (as objectively as possible) Jim's *two* religions. I had absolutely no plan to confront him with that but, still, that “two religions” thing had spun my cognitive wheels into motion. I knew lots of others who also appeared to have more than one religion. Would that be okay? Would that not be okay? Hmmm...

Jim made no secret of his enthusiasm for Georgia Football and for Christianity in the workplace. Always visible on his well-organized desk was a large Bible. Emblems of Georgia football were also on his desk and his credenza and his office wall. Even his home mailbox was emblazoned with the slogan, *How 'Bout Them Dawgs?*®. UGA symbols were on his car, along with a small, tasteful bumper sticker that advertised the megachurch he attended. He had been the teacher, there, for a large Sunday morning Bible class for several years.

At church, at work and at play, Jim was known as a man's man. He had memorized the current Dawgs® schedule and could recite critical player-by-player stats for all the current (and several former) Georgia football players. He spoke confidently about the school's coaches and the relative wisdom of their respective appointments...and of their recent game and season strategy decisions. He'd really light up whenever someone engaged him in conversation about his favorite team. To make sure that'd happen often, even his golf balls and much of his golfing attire were marked with trademarked Georgia Football symbols.

Jim clearly enjoyed going to church. He found the fellowship rewarding. Told me that several times. He was especially attracted to other church members who were also Dawgs® fans. His nationally- and globally-admired pastor was among them. They enjoyed golfing and meeting often for lunch.

Coworkers sometimes asked Jim about his faith. He typically responded by proclaiming the essence of the “what ‘we’ believe” franchise of his mainstream denomination. Like most other Believers (including me, at that time), he could only speak to his denominational dogma. Why? That’s because he had learned only WHAT to study in the Bible...to confirm those Doctrines. Family and career and hobbies and such had left us both with no perceived time to learn HOW to study the Bible...to discover 1st-Century Truth.

The problem with that? Frankly, it is this: All seminaries teach “what ‘we’ believe.” Their naive graduates preach “what ‘we’ believe” and their sincerely faithful, but fully passive parishioners buy-in to “what ‘we’ believe.”



By contrast, Jim had made time to learn all the critical stuff about his “other religion.” About Georgia Football, he had digested MEAT. About Christianity, he had consumed only MILK. (Keep in mind, here, that I was still a milk-fed churchian at that time, too!)

Is it possible that Jim did NOT have two religions? Might he, instead, have had a religion and a hobby? If so, which was which? Of which was he a fan—a zealot? Of which was he an enthusiastic, but passive stadium seat occupier—a follower?

> “My people are destroyed for lack of [righteousness?] [sincerity?] [worship?] [prayer?] [hyperspirituality?] [faith?] [holiness?] [regular church attendance?] [believing “what ‘we’ believe”?] [getting “truly ‘saved’?”] knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee...” —Hosea 4:6

Here's a sensible paraphrase of a pertinent proclamation by the apostle, Paul, at Hebrews 5:11-14—

> “We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teachings of righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.”

Bible knowledge is acquired actively, objectively and intellectually, never passively. “It is written.” Because it is written, each of us must be aggressive in our objective searching for it. The burning question, then, is this: “Should we be as aggressive as are the sports fans who do whatever it takes to become fully knowledgeable about their favorite sports and their favorite teams and players?”

✓ God rewards those who diligently seek him. —Hebrews. 11:6

The KJV scriptures [e.g.: Hebrews 5:13] call those who fail to engage their MINDS to gain Bible truth, “babes.” “Babes” reason with their hearts; their feelings. While acknowledging the leanings of their hearts, mature[ing] Christians, having put on the mind of Christ, reason with their minds.



Most believers and their clergy appear never to advance beyond the *babe* stage. Their thinking about the Bible and Christianity is fully subjective. It is

driven by a strong, heartfelt trust in their very human and also typically ill-informed human leaders. Two scriptures have led me to the conclusions I've just submitted to you:

- > “He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool...” —Proverbs 28:26
- > “Thus saith the LORD; ‘Cursed be the man that trusteth in man...’”
—Jeremiah 17:5

Please stop reading this for just a minute and read Proverbs 1:22 in your Bible. This is how it reads in mine—

- > “How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity?...and fools hate knowledge?”

Because their minds are disengaged, they are hyper-vulnerable to “other” spirits. Satan will find it easy to deceive them. If he hasn’t deceived them already, they’ll be easy prey for him early during his upcoming successful masquerade as Jesus Christ, per 2 Thessalonians 2.

Meanwhile, you may recall that deceiving spirits can yield the same *warm fuzzies* that most of us associate with The Holy Spirit. That’s how they deceive those who haven’t yet comprehended that “He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool...” —Proverbs 28:26.

- > “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils.” —1 Timothy 4:1
- > “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.”
—1 John 4:1

Most believers acquire substantially more knowledge about and understanding of their hobbies than about the Bible and Christianity. Individual Christian believers are at fault, yes. But the visible church has also missed the mark of its high calling: Collectively, it has done a respectable job of making Believers, but The Great Commission, at Matthew 28:19,20, is not about

making BELIEVERS: Jesus told us to make DISCIPLES of those who've heard and believed the Gospel message. Huge differences!

Who's doing that? And of what possible value might be all those "houses of god" filled with BELIEVERS—folk who're fully convinced that they're paying professional christians to do all of that 2 Timothy 2:15 studying and critical thinking for them?

The Church is alive and well: God will always have His remnant. The Church will rise from the ashes of the visible church, against which the gates of Hell may already have prevailed. With which of those groups will you be aligned?

For me, it's really easy to envision the visible church as a magnificent pro football stadium: Paying fans fill the bleachers. Millions of others enjoy the televised games. Professional cheerleaders provide the entertainment. Professional players strut onto the playing fields and pretend to "whup the devuhl" out of "the competition." All go back home after a nice meal and a few armchair quarterback stories...having fulfilled (until next week's pompous parade, at least) their responsibility to support "the home team."

Do you have a hobby? Do you have a religion? Which is which? Are you a fan – i.e.: a zealot – or are you among the passive occupiers of the Sunday morning bleachers; i.e.: a follower?

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