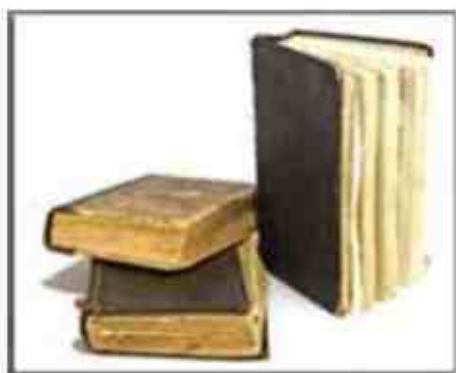


Shrines to Apostasy



by John T Polk II

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Respect for God, if it is to be acceptable, must be according to His guidelines and regulations, not mankind's (Mark 7:6-8). It doesn't matter who the people are, or where or when they live, God has always made it clear what pleases Him. "But without faith *it is* impossible to please *Him*" (Hebrews 11:6), thus, God's Word makes faith possible (Mark 11:22; John 17:20; 20:30-31). In every nation, those who please God are those who do His commandments (Acts 10:35-35; Revelation 22:14).

THE PURPOSE OF A SHRINE DOES MATTER

One must remember that the tower of Babel was to be an impressive edifice designed only to "make a name for ourselves" (Genesis 11:1-9). "Babel" and "Babylon" have since always referred to their "confusion" of languages by which God scattered them over "all the earth." But note that "they ceased building the city." *It is thus ever true that those who are determined to make a name for themselves through whatever means, and not give God the glory are:*

1. *Opposed to God's purposes;*
2. *Destined for God's rejection; and,*
3. *Living in "confusion," not cooperation with God's will. (Cf I Corinthians 14:33)*

God gave a moveable location (a.k.a. “tabernacle”) for the Israelites to come to for worship under Moses’ Law (**Exodus 40:34-38**). Every encampment in their wilderness wanderings had this at its center (**Numbers 2:17**). Not until King David did God reveal where His permanent place for worship was to be built: in Jerusalem (**2 Samuel 7:1-11**); and by whom: David’s son, Solomon (**I Kings 8:14-21**).

After Solomon’s death, the kingdom divided into Northern and Southern kingdoms. The Northern kingdom, Israel, so corrupted itself that many years later God removed it from the “Promised Land” by the Assyrians (**2 Kings 17:5-23**). The Southern kingdom, Judah, was removed by the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar, who “burned the house of God” (**2 Chronicles 36:15-21**).

After the ensuing 70-year exile, God began restoring Israel to their land, that they might rebuild the Temple. This was accomplished under the leadership of Zerubbabel (**Ezra 3:1-13; 6:14-18**). Many years later, the Temple was destroyed again. Herod the Great lavishly built it in 46 years. It was finished prior to Jesus’ adulthood (**John 2:20**). Though Jesus used this temple to observe Moses’ Law while He lived, He taught the Samaritan woman that Jerusalem would not continue to be God’s center of worship (**John 4:19-26**). When Jesus cleansed the Temple of its defilers, John shows readers that Jesus’ body would be the new temple (**John 2:13-22**).

WHAT IS GOD'S "SHRINE" TODAY?

The church of Christ is Christ's spiritual body, for Paul wrote to "the church of God which is at Corinth" (I Corinthians 1:2). Paul had preached the "gospel" and many Corinthians hearing, believed and were baptized to establish the church of Christ there (I Corinthians 15:1-11; Acts 18:8). Their baptism had formed them as members into the one body of Christ (I Corinthians 12:12-14, 18, 27), which is "the church" (I Corinthians 1:2; Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:18, 24). Known by their God-given name, "Christians" (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 11:26) they are described as baptized believers who comprise the body of Christ, the church of God, the temple of the Holy Spirit – which are all one and the same (I Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:18-20).

God's Temple today is NOT a building made of brick and mortar, gold, silver, bronze or iron, but it IS His blood-bought church (Acts 20:28), made up of the saved (Acts 2:38, 41, 47). Paul easily made this point to pagan idolaters when he said:

God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things... "Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone,

something shaped by art and man's devising.
(Acts 17:24-25, 29)

Since “God is Spirit” (John 4:24) and “spirit does not have flesh and bones” (Luke 24:39), then there is today NO physical location that is the habitation of God. Although God has no fleshly body, He may use any physical body offered to Him for His purpose (Romans 6:11-14). There is, physically, NO “holy land,” “temple,” “shrine,” or “sanctuary” that represents God’s presence more than any other! It is idolatrous to speak of any building as though it were some “sacred place” where God may be more intimately found. Jesus’ kingdom is not based in a “holy place,” but in “holiness” and “grace” (Hebrews 12:14; Titus 2:11-14).

Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, “The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you. (Luke 17:20-21)

THE CHURCH OF GOD IS NOT FOR MEN’S GLORY

Even in the Old Testament, God disapproved of altars that were devoted to His worship being used in ways that glorified men. He instructed Moses in Exodus 20:22-26, that altars of stone should not be hewn with men’s tools lest they be profaned, and that the steps going up to the altar should not expose the priests’ nakedness. It should

not be used to show off man's craftiness or as a stage for sensual entertainment. The artisans selected to make the tabernacle, furnishings, and priestly clothing at Sinai were miraculously gifted to accomplish their work for the glory of God (**Exodus 31:10-11**). Thus, the tabernacle service was NOT to elevate man's craftsmanship but God's work.

In the New Testament church, Paul worked:

... Within the limits of the sphere which God appointed us... not boasting of things beyond measure, that is, in other men's labors.

(**2 Corinthians 10:12-18**)

He tried to avoid adding to another man's preaching labors lest he appear to receive glory for greater work than his own. A Christian, then, must NOT be:

... Vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the Head... [or to, jtpII] subject yourselves to regulations-- Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle... according to the commandments and doctrines of men? These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh. (**Colossians 2:18-23**)

Both through the Old Law of Moses before Christ came, or now through the New Law of Jesus Christ and His church since His death and resurrection, it is clear that in serving God, emphasis must always be on:

1. God's powerful plan to save sinners;
2. Jesus Christ's peerless presentation of that plan; and,

3. The Holy Spirit's precise preservation of that plan (Cf **Ephesians 2:1-3:7**).

The emphasis should NOT be centered on **the works of the saved** ("Look what WE have done"), **the sacrifices of the worshipers** ("Worship must entertain US"), **or the beliefs of man-made churches** ("ALL must believe what WE teach by mantras, rituals, ceremonies, catechisms, creeds, manuals, intimidation, or disciplines"). Christians are to be liberated from:

1. **Devotion** to an opulent, ornate building;
2. **Debasement** by worldly, profane, idolatrous displays;
3. The **disgrace** of so-called "holy" seasons or services; or,
4. Other ungodly **distractions** from the real spiritual objectives of church.

WHAT ARE "SHRINES TO APOSTASY"?

Having this Bible truth before us, to what degree does one apostatize who turns buildings into "religious relics," "shrines," or "temples?" Those religions opposed to God may have such, and even name these edifices for living, dead, mythological or beatified personages. People who

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Ely Cathedral: *The 700-year-old walls in Ely Cathedral, England, are festooned with dedications like those featured below.*

have been steeped in traditional, mystical, ritual, or material religions seek this recognition. They thus have built huge, ornate, and impressive:

- Temples or shrines dedicated to Buddha, Shiva, Diana, Apollo, etc.;
- Mosques in memory of Mohammed;
- Cathedrals dedicated to “Saint Paul,” “Saint Peter,” “Saint Mary,” or “Saint John,” etc.; or

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- Church Libraries dedicated to the memory of a beloved, departed saint.

When the practice of religion emphasizes impressive buildings, especially ones devoted to man and not God, the structures are monuments to apostasy and demonstrate a departure away from God!

One has but to walk through the historic church buildings of England (Westminster Abbey, “Saint” Paul’s Cathedral, or similar structures in Ely, Peterborough, Canterbury, Cambridge, York, or throughout the country) to learn why its religion has died. For their buildings are memorials to men rather than to God.



Above left: In Memory of the faithful service of Henry Stone White Born March 31, 1806. Died February 8, 1885. For fifty eight years Verger of this Cathedral. Placed by the Dean and Chapter.

Above right: In memory of the faithful service of John William Henry Southby, for the space of Sixty years Verger of this Cathedral. Born March 27, 1801. Died July 8, 1880. Placed by the Dean and Chapter.

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Walls, pews, stones, plaques, steps, stained glass windows, all are devoted to men and movements, and not to God!

England's church buildings have become mausoleums, museums, marketplaces, or menageries whose rituals are but funereal cosmetics for church corpses.

They are headstones of human history rather than awesome altars for the Almighty! Whether it be Church of England, Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Christian Church, Church of Christ, *et. al.*, matters not.



Above: - *This original Cane Ridge church building, where Barton W. Stone established a church of Christ near Paris, Kentucky, in the early 1800s, is now a Christian Church shrine.*

The included pictures tell the sad but similar story of what happens when Jesus Christ decreases, but men increase.

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There is no difference in kind, but only in appearance and names of those who are so “honored.”

It is sad, indeed, when any church of Christ adopts this deadly trait, and also “teaches men so” (**Matthew 5:19**). Leaders in apostasy always seem to point the finger of accusation at other apostates and say, “But we’re not like them.” However, they are!

It matters not whether the direction of apostasy is to the “right” or to the “left,” it only matters that is “away from” Jesus Christ (I Timothy 4:1: “depart from the faith”).

NEW TESTAMENT 1ST CENTURY “SHRINE BUILDERS” EXAMINED

We read in the New Testament of Paul’s encounter with some in the city of Ephesus:

And about that time there arose a great commotion about the Way. For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Diana, brought no small profit to the craftsmen. He called them together with the workers of similar occupation, and said: “Men, you know that we have our prosperity by this trade. Moreover you see and hear that not only at Ephesus, but throughout almost all Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying that they are not gods which are

made with hands. So not only is this trade of ours in danger of falling into disrepute, but also the temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised and her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worship." Now when they heard this, they were full of wrath and cried out, saying, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" ([Acts 19:23-28](#))

Please notice:

1. Their only concern was over money, not truth.
2. They had not made only one shrine, but repeated their error.
3. They shouted down the truth of the Bible by repeating falsehood.

The Methodist commentator, Adam Clarke, who was often quoted by the late and lamented Guy N. Woods, said of [Acts 19:24](#):

It is reported that Alexander [*the Great, jtpII*] offered to make it [*The Temple to Diana in Ephesus, jtpII*] as magnificent as it was before, provided he might put his name on the front; but this was refused."

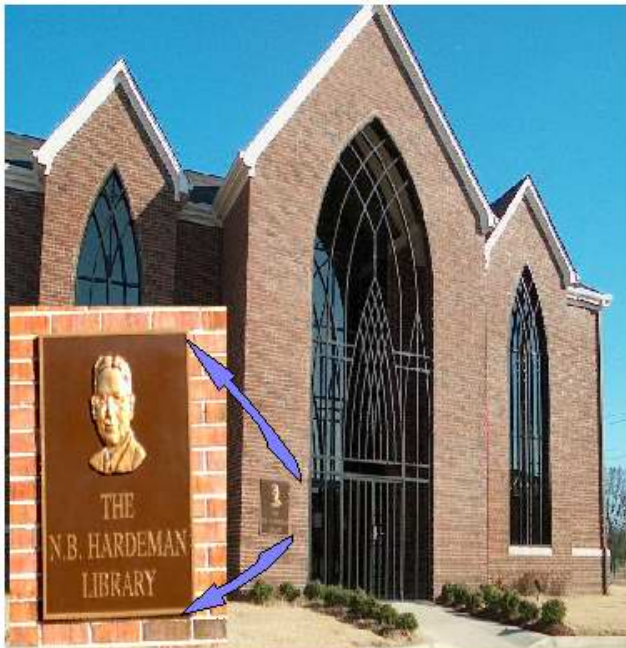
The 19th Century Baptist preacher, C. H. Spurgeon said:

"How finely does he [*Demetrius, jtpII*] veil self-interest under the cloak of religion. Selfishness is the most powerful adversary to the cause of truth."

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Let us not divide over men's names, men's doctrines, men's buildings, or men's methods, but rather let us "be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (**I Corinthians 1:10-13**). Our Lord prayed that it be so "that the world may believe that You send Me." (**John 17:20-21**)

It is lamentable that, in the churches of Christ, any would Mimic Sectarianism's Outlandish Practices!



Above: A library of a church of Christ in the 21st century, dedicated to N. B. Hardeman.

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All Scriptures and comments, unless otherwise noted, are based on the New King James Version (NKJV).

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