

“THINK ON THESE THINGS”

Philippians 4:8

Putting “*The Cart Before the Horse*”

By Bobby Witherington

“Prepare your outside work. Make it fit for yourself in the field: And afterward build your house” (Prov. 24:27).

This verse primarily addresses those who are involved in agricultural pursuits. Before building a “*house*” on the farm, first make sure that the land is suitable for producing a harvest. Before building “*your house*” on the land, Solomon said “**Prepare your outside work. Make it fit for yourself in the field.**” In other words, don’t get the cart before the horse! After all, it is the horse that pulls the cart; the cart does not pull the horse. Put things in their proper order!

It seems that people in general and Americans in particular, are very impatient. Generally, it seems that what we want we want “right now,” or even sooner if possible. Consequently, even before getting a “decent job,” many purchase expensive automobiles they cannot afford, buy things they don’t really need on credit, co-habit before marriage, and get married before they even realize the responsibilities inherent in the marriage relationship, and before they have learned to respect the sanctity of marriage. In other words, they are putting “*the cart before the horse*.” And there are countless examples of this being done throughout society in general.

Sadly, this tendency to put “*the cart before the horse*” is also evidenced in the spiritual realm, and it is in this realm that it becomes such a tragedy. Hence, the balance of this article has to do with “*putting the cart before the horse*” as it reflects the spiritual realm.

However, before citing examples of “*the cart*” being put “*before the horse*,” we shall first note that the Lord Himself emphasized the importance of our putting things in their proper order. For example, in Matthew 6:33 Jesus admonished His disciples to “**seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness....**” “First” means first, not second or third. Contextually, Jesus had mentioned such things as “**what shall we eat,**” or “**what shall we drink,**” or “**what shall we wear**” (vs. 31). Clearly, such matters are very important, but not nearly as important as seeking “**first the kingdom of God and His righteousness!**” In Matthew 16:26 Jesus asked this soul-searching question, “**for what profit is it for a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?**” In one respect, this is a hypothetical question, for no one man has ever gained “*the whole world*,” but even if such were to happen at the expense of one’s soul, he has made a bad bargain indeed. After all, a person’s soul will dwell eternally either in heaven or in hell, and when a person dies he leaves behind everything of a tangible nature. To be more focused upon the material things of this life than the well-being of one’s immortal soul is to put “*the cart before the horse*.” Other scriptures could be cited and in which the Lord stressed the importance of putting first things first, or that of getting things in their proper order, but the ones already cited are sufficient to make the point. So we shall now cite some this-world examples of people, in the spiritual realm, putting:

“*The Cart Before the Horse*”

1. Allowing one’s own will to take precedence over the will of God. Jesus, Who left “*us an example that you should follow His steps*” (1 Pet. 2:21), said of Himself, “*I have come down from heaven, not to do My will, but the will of Him who sent Me*” (Jn. 6:38). Even when He was virtually in the very shadow of the cross, Jesus fervently prayed, “*O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me,*” but then He said “*not as I will, but as You will*” (Matt. 26:39). “The bottom line” is this: at all times and under all circumstances we must allow God’s will to supersede our will. After all, salvation is only promised to the “*he who does the will of My Father in heaven*” (Matt. 7:21).

2. Allowing one’s feelings to take priority over faith. Genuine faith comes “*by hearing and hearing by the*

word of God" (Rom. 10:17). Indeed, we must "*walk by faith, not by sight*" (2 Cor. 5:7), but there is no way to "**walk by faith**" apart from learning and submitting to "**the word of God**," the very source from whence true faith comes. However, when it comes to religious matters multitudes subscribe to the notion that "if it feels good, it must be all right." But wise Solomon knew better; he said "**There is a way that seems right** (as we might say "*which feels good*," bw), **but its end is the way of death**" (Prov. 14:12).

3. Following human creeds instead of the word of God. "*All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness*" (2 Tim. 3:16). Through the scriptures "**the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work**" (2 Tim. 3:17). The Holy Spirit guided the apostle into "**all truth**" (Jn. 16:13); God's "**divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness**" (2 Pet. 1:3). And we are divinely warned against perverting the scriptures (Gal. 1:6-9), and against adding to or taking from the word of God (Rev. 22:18-19). Even so, we are living in a world of diverse human creeds, every one of which contains something more than the Bible, or less than the Bible, or something other than the Bible! Diverse as they may be, the Koran, the Book of Mormon, the Catholic Catechism, the Methodist Disciple, the Baptist Manual, etc., all have one thing in common—they are all the products of *uninspired* men, even though inspired scripture affirmed, saying, "**the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps**" (Jer. 10:23).

4. Salvation before obedience. Multitudes claim to have been "gloriously saved," but who have never rendered obedience to the gospel of Jesus Christ! And countless preachers are ready to "preach anyone into heaven," notwithstanding how immoral or how reprobate his life may have been, and that right up to the time of one's demise! However, please contrast that idea with these words from the pen of an inspired apostle: "**And to you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power**" (2 Thess. 1:7-9). To claim salvation before obedience to God is to put "*the cart before the horse.*"

5. Baptism before faith. Jesus expressed it this way: "**He who believes and is baptized will be saved...**" (Mk. 16:16). The eunuch from Ethiopia, having heard Philip who "**preached Jesus to him**," said "**here is water, What hinders me from being baptized**" (Acts 8:35-36). It was "**then**" that Philip said, "**If you believe with all your heart, you may**" (Acts 8:37). Philip, who knew the divine order as it had been stated by Jesus, was not about to baptize the eunuch until he had proof that he believed "**with all**" his heart. Yet in today's religious world, there are literally millions who have changed the "mode" of baptism (which means immersion) into sprinkling or pouring, and who sprinkle water upon **infants** who know nothing whatever about God, Jesus Christ, heaven, or hell! This is getting "*the cart before the horse*," but sadly multitudes go through life feeling saved because they "got baptized" when they were infants.

6. Salvation before baptism. As already noted, Jesus said "**He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned**" (Mk. 16:16). To the Jews on Pentecost, who had already heard the gospel, and who therefore believed (Rom. 10:17), and who asked, saying, "**Men and brethren, what shall we do,**" Peter replied, saying, "**Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit**" (Acts 2:37-38). In Acts 2:38 repentance and baptism are both looking in the same direction, namely "**the remission of sins**." Grammatically, whether one examines this text from the English or the original Greek, whatever repentance is "**for**," baptism is "**for**." Yet millions in the religious world emphasize the necessity of repentance, while denying the necessity of baptism. To preach or to practice "salvation before baptism" is to get "*the cart before the horse!*"

Conclusion: Many other examples of getting "*the cart before the horse*" in matters religious could be cited—such as wearing human religious names instead of "**Christian**," of joining human churches instead of being a part of the church Jesus built, putting pleasure before regular scriptural worship, etc., etc., could be cited, but hopefully we have said enough in order to make the point intended. Beloved, when it comes to serving God, there is a prescribed order, a way which is right and cannot be wrong. Unless one prefers hell over heaven, it is never wise to get "*the cart before the horse.*" Consider ye well! — **Rise Up and Build**, June 18, 2017. ■

Service Times - Sunday: 9:00 & 10:00 AM; 6:00 PM - Wednesday: 7:00 PM

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