

Snake Charmer or Snake Handler

Luke 10: 19

In the world of religion, you will see many gimmicks and tricks to attract a crowd. These days, there is much reliance on high tech graphics etc. to dazzle the masses. And some have even used miniature transmitters and receivers to pretend the working of the Holy Spirit. However, they pale in comparison to the real magicians and their powerful mind control.

The Early Church had this bunch also; but they didn't last long.

Acts 8:5 to 25 - Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. And there was great joy in that city. But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God. And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries. But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done. Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost. And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity. Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me. And they, when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, returned to Jerusalem, and

preached the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.

Are what we are seeing in some churches, just like in Samaria; bewitched by sorceries?

As JP Barnum once said; “A sucker is born every minute”. Does anyone else have another angle? Hinduism has built into its discriminating caste system, one level called the “snake charmers”. Wikipedia offers some insight on the subject. Snake charming is the practice of pretending to hypnotise a snake by playing an instrument. A typical performance may also include handling the snakes or performing other seemingly dangerous acts, as well as other street performance staples, like juggling and sleight of hand. The practice is most common in India, though other Asian nations such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Malaysia are also home to performers, as are the North African countries of Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia.

Ancient Egypt was home to one form of snake charming, though the practice as it exists today likely arose in India. It eventually spread throughout Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa. Despite a sort of golden age in the 20th century, snake charming is today in danger of dying out. This is due to a variety of factors, chief among them the recent enforcement of a 1972 law in India banning ownership of serpents. In retaliation, snake charmers have organised in recent years, protesting the loss of their only means of livelihood, and the government has made some overtures to them.

Many snake charmers live a wandering existence, visiting towns and villages on market days and during festivals. With a few rare exceptions, however, they typically make every effort to keep themselves from harm's way. For one, the charmer typically sits out of biting range, and his animal is sluggish and reluctant to attack anyway. More drastic means of protection include removing the creature's fangs or venom glands, or even sewing the snake's mouth shut. The most popular species are those native to the snake charmer's home region, typically various kinds of cobras, though vipers and other types are also used.

What do you think would happen, if the snake charmers engaged Godly prophets in a contest?

Exodus 7: 8 to 12 - And the LORD spake unto Moses and unto Aaron, saying, When Pharaoh shall speak unto you, saying, Shew a miracle for you: then thou shalt say unto Aaron, Take thy rod, and cast it before Pharaoh, and it shall become a serpent. And Moses and Aaron went in unto Pharaoh, and they did so as the LORD had commanded: and Aaron cast down his rod before Pharaoh, and before his servants, and it became a serpent. Then Pharaoh also called the wise men and the sorcerers: now the magicians of Egypt, they also did in like manner with their enchantments. For they cast down every man his rod, and they became serpents: but Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods.

So the best in Egypt, Jannes and Jambres didn't stand a chance. But when their counterparts get into the Church, they can cause a lot of trouble.

2 Timothy 3: 8 - Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith.

Now if the person didn't want to be a snake charmer; could they climb the ladder to a better profession? No! If you are the son of a snake charmer, your descendants could only be snake handlers. While there may be some interesting aspects to the job; what are the benefits like? And as for the benefits...well. Longevity is apparently not one of them. In fact, with all the new environmental legislation being brought in; it's getting harder and harder to legally get and keep a snake. Is this breed dying out? What's an honest snake handler going to do? The nearest occupation, selling snake oils, has a dubious reputation. I am so thankful that I am not bound by those bondages.

**John 8:32 - And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.
John 8:36 - Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed.**

Did you know that there are some snake handlers over here in North America also? But it's only been here since the early 1900s, and is not as refined as back in India. National Geographic News ran a feature on them on April 7, 2003. "Snake Handlers Hang on in Appalachian Churches". Churches survive and grow not by attracting new members, but because of enduring family traditions. "Serpent handling is maintained through powerful families whose children have carried on that tradition for up to four generations," Hood said. "There are a small number of converts, but they generally maintain themselves through these families, and by people marrying into the tradition." While Junior McCormick's grandparents handled serpents, he said he came to the practice later, after a religious awakening that included baptism and scripture study. "I prayed for this, for God to give me the sign to do this because it was in the scriptures," he said. "I don't want to get out of it. I want to get further into it." Churches that practice serpent handling tend to be wary of publicity. This desire for privacy stems, in large part, from negative media attention that inevitably follows the practice after injuries or deaths due to snakebite occur. "There are over 100 documented deaths from serpent bites," said Hood. "In every tradition, people are bitten and maimed by them. They risk their lives all the time by handling them. If you go to any serpent-handling church, you'll see people with atrophied hands, and missing fingers. All the serpent-handling families have suffered such things."

"It's a misconception that these people believe they won't get hurt," Hood explains. "The Bible says to take up serpents, not that they won't be bitten. If

they're bit, that's up to God. The issue is obedience to God. There's no magic power type of stuff. They know the reality of it because so many families have had people hurt and killed." Junior McCormick has seen many serpent-handling bites, and experienced them himself. None of those experiences have deterred him from answering his calling. "Some people were bit, and I believe God was ready for them and their time had come," he said. "I was bit 14 times, by rattlesnakes, copperheads, water moccasins, and I never used anti venom?all I had was just Jesus. I've been bitten badly, but I'll go back the next week and take the serpents out again."

Recently, there was another article in the news, about another pastor killed in the line of duty. No, he wasn't martyred for preaching the Word of God. He was playing with his pet snake, when he bit him. Serpent-handling pastor profiled earlier in Washington Post dies from rattlesnake bite. By Julia Duin, Published: May 29, 2012. Mack Wolford, a flamboyant Pentecostal pastor from West Virginia whose serpent-handling talents were profiled last November in The Washington Post Magazine , hoped the outdoor service he had planned for Sunday at an isolated state park would be a "homecoming like the old days," full of folks speaking in tongues, handling snakes and having a "great time." But it was not the sort of homecoming he foresaw. Instead, Wolford, who turned 44 the previous day, was bitten by a rattlesnake he owned for years. He died late Sunday. Mark Randall "Mack" Wolford was known all over Appalachia as a daring man of conviction. He believed that the Bible mandates that Christians handle serpents to test their faith in God ? and that, if they are bitten, they trust in God alone to heal them.

The son of a serpent handler who himself died in 1983 after being bitten, Wolford was trying to keep the practice alive, both in West Virginia, where it is legal, and in neighboring states where it is not. He was the kind of man reporters love: articulate, friendly and appreciative of media attention. Many serpent-handling Pentecostals retreat from journalists, but Wolford didn't. He'd take them on snake-hunting expeditions.

Now, preaching the Word of God is a tremendous responsibility, and should not be undertaken lightly. There are people of this mind-set, that don't go to doctors, and have let their offspring die because they with-held insulin from their children. What can people do? In the Dark Middle Ages, Roman Catholicism banned personal Bible reading. They felt that the ignorant masses could not properly understand the Scriptures. Actually, they feared more people following Martin Luther, and getting saved.

Hebrews 4:12 - For the Word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, & is a discerner of the thoughts & intents of the heart.

Our Lord Jesus Christ spent much time and effort in correcting false interpretations of His Word. First, Our Lord encountered the devil.

Luke 4: 1 to 13 - And Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, Being forty days tempted of the devil. And in those days he did eat nothing: and when they were ended, he afterward hungered. And the devil said unto him, If thou be the Son of God, command this stone that it be made bread. And Jesus answered him, saying, It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God. And the devil, taking him up into an high mountain, shewed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said unto him, All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them: for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it. If thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be thine. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. And he brought him to Jerusalem, and set him on a pinnacle of the temple, and said unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down from hence: For it is written, He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee: And in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. And Jesus answering said unto him, It is said, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him for a season.

Did you see how Our Lord Jesus, even when under great duress, was able to resist the devil. Even when He was challenged to prove that He was the Son of God. So when someone challenges you to test your faith; don't be controlled, and pressured to do something that you know is wrong. And when they say that it's in the Bible; check it out. Don't just accept it as Gospel Truth. Especially check out the context that it is in.

One of the favourite passages misused is:

Luke 10: 17 to 20 - And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name. And he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven. Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven.

Clearly, this is referring to a new privilege that Our Lord Jesus had given to believers. And the disciples were rejoicing at the fact that they could now cast out the demons that were afflicting the people. Our Lord has to re-focus

their attention. Casting out demons is nice, but the real important thing is that our names are written in the Book of Life.

The Bible is an amazing Book. And we need the Holy Spirit to properly understand it.

1 Corinthians 2: 9 to 16 - But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them , because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.

So when Luke 10:19 says that we tread on snakes and scorpions; it is clearly referring to demons. Even the devil is referred as a serpent.

Revelation 20: 1 to 3 - And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season.

There are some other factors to consider. If the modern snake handlers take the Bible so literally; why don't they go around stomping on scorpions? If this was as important as they say; why didn't our Lord and the disciples go around stomping every critter they encountered? There are no recorded incidents of them doing that in the Bible.

Now I know that Paul had a run-in with a viper.

Acts 28: 1 to 6 - And when they were escaped, then they knew that the island was called Melita. And the barbarous people shewed us no little kindness: for they kindled a fire, and received us every one, because of the present rain,

and because of the cold. And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks, and laid them on the fire, there came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand. And when the barbarians saw the venomous beast hang on his hand, they said among themselves, No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live. And he shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm. Howbeit they looked when he should have swollen, or fallen down dead suddenly: but after they had looked a great while, and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds, and said that he was a god.

Did you notice that Paul was not testing his faith by picking up that viper? He was serving Our Lord Jesus when he was bitten, and Our Lord protected Paul; as He did many times.

2 Corinthians 11: 23 to 27 - Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.

Clearly Paul was not trying to test his faith, or tempting Our Lord.

You may not be sure what the Bible is saying, because there are many points of view floating around. Pray about it.

John 16: 13 - However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority , but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.

And don't be forced into accepting something off-base. If Our Lord Jesus Christ was able to resist the urging to mis-use the Scriptures; we should be able to leave those snakes alone too.

Matthew 4: 5 to 7 - Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.

One way they are tempting Our Lord; is with the false doctrine being preached. Two of the worst offenders to-day, are Roman Catholicism and Kingdom Theology. If you are not aware of what they stand for; study up. Ankerberg has a series of small books, called "Facts On...". There is one on Roman Catholicism, and one on the Faith Movement. When reading the Bible, you will see that there is much symbolism used. It takes a mature believer or pastor, led by the Holy Spirit to discern the correct meanings. That's why the disciples preached often on correcting doctrine.

Jude 1: 3 - Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.

Hebrews 5: 10 to 6: 8 - Called of God an high priest after the order of Melchisedec. Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing. For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. And this will we do, if God permit. For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame. For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned.

So when those snake charmers quote Mark 16; they are wrong; and over 100 people have been uselessly killed in their religious game playing. What does the Bible say?

Mark 16: 14 to 18 - Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen. And he said

unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.

How do the Scriptures relate to what's being preached and practiced by the snake charmers? Preaching the Word, with immersed baptism is always first priority. The casting out of demons in Jesus' Name is still required. Now the devil will hit back as hard as possible; and in the course of serving Our Lord, many things will happen. When we are in the centre of God's Will, He will take care of us; regardless of serpents and poisons hitting us. Speaking in tongues is important to-day also; but is not the first sign of the in-filling of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 19: 1 to 7 - And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied. And all the men were about twelve. Praying for the healing of people is always in order. Some have the gift of healing; but most do not; and they should not be pronouncing people as healed; when they are not. Otherwise they are false prophets.

The key is to make sure that we are in God's Perfect Will. Then we won't have to go around proving ourselves, by testing our faith. And from what we have seen in the Bible and by the practices of Our Lord and his disciples; there is no similarity between Christ's Commands, and what the snake handlers are doing.

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