

After-Thought Authority

By: Dan Shipley

An interesting story with a good point appeared in a recent issue of *Nuggets*. It told of a Marine recruiting sergeant who happened upon an impressive sight while traveling the backwoods country. At this one roadside farm, he saw targets painted just about everywhere -- on the barns, on fences, and on all the outbuildings. And exactly in the center of each target's bull's eye, there was a bullet hole! Knowing the Marine Corps could use a marksman like that, the sergeant stopped at the farm house in hopes of recruiting this sharpshooter. His knock on the door was answered by a gangling, barefoot lad of a not-too-bright appearance who proudly admitted that he had made the targets and bullet holes. The sergeant asked him how he managed to get a perfect bull's eye with every shot. He drawled, "Aw, that's easy, Sarge. I jes' shoot first, an' then I paint rings around the bullet hole!"

It occurred to me that a lot of people make bull's eyes in religion like that too. They "shoot" *first* by committing themselves to some religious position or affiliation, then *later*, when necessary, seek to justify their actions by "painting on" the target rings with some kind of after-thought "authority." Multitudes have made such commitments and in doing so have entrusted their souls to positions which they have *assumed* pleased God, *but in which they have no real understanding or conviction*. This means that what these people are religiously is attributable to something less than their regard for Bible truth – and they, therefore, are something less than what God would have them to be. In spiritual matters as elsewhere, eternally important commitments are apt to be improperly motivated and rashly made.

But, in religion, as nowhere else, once committed, seldom changed. Why? It is because **"every way of a man is right in his own eyes"** (**Prov. 21:2**), and perhaps because many had rather be *considered* right than to *be* right. And because, though essential, prides make it difficult to render an objective assessment of what one *has* done or become. So -- out comes the target paint of after-thought authority. Just about any "shot" of commitment can be transformed into a bull's eye using such "paint" as feelings or sincerity. Other popular shades of target paint are: ***It doesn't make any difference what you believe, The Bible doesn't say not to, and All roads lead to heaven.*** No wonder so many view themselves as being "on target" in religion.



But all such efforts ignore the fact that only God has the right to make such a "target" and that His word (Bible truth) constitutes the mark (bull's eye) for which all men are to strive. (Sin is missing *His* mark.) Coming to Jesus Christ and salvation is impossible apart from hearing and learning His will (**Jn. 6:44,45**) and abiding in Christ means abiding in His teaching (**2 Jn. 9**). Therefore, all right relationships with the Lord involve a right relationship with Bible truth and vice versa (**Col. 3:17; 1 Pt. 4:11**).

Was it Bible truth that influenced what you are?

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