

Bubbles

Bubbles aren't in the Bible. But we need to be aware of them because they can be deadly. Many of us, believers as well as unbelievers, live in a bubble of our own making. We're careful not to allow anyone – regardless how persuasive or compelling his or her argument may be – to puncture our bubble, let alone get inside it to threaten us. Not even God.

The bubble is a secure, protective barrier to deny unwanted ideas or truths access into our life. It protects us from stressful interactions with others whose beliefs and values are not ours. It protects the certainty of our personal beliefs from outside challenge. It's there precisely to protect our own values, beliefs, and ideas or opinions. The bubble protects us from the consequences of holding politically incorrect beliefs or values. Bubbles are so that we can muddle our way through a self-absorbed life, maintaining personal peace and a measure of happiness. It's a bidirectional barrier: We can live a self-indulgent, self-willed life without challenge *and* it excuses our indifference to the needs of others.

In the Garden (Genesis 3:8), the man and his wife, alienated from God due to disobedience, tried to hide. We're doing the same today. That's the chief purpose of bubbles. They're to hide from God and from His Word. We hide from the truths and the responsibilities that God has given us. We hide from the judgments in the Word for disobedience. We hide even from the great promises that are there. Do *believers* do this? Why else does Paul command us to "put on the new man" (Eph 4:24)? Because there are those in the church who may not want to. Bubbles defend our autonomy.

The church in America has seen a massive turning inward of self. It may indeed be that a more exalted, more satisfying, more God-pleasing life is available to us without the bubble, but we find it more secure simply to hide inside a bubble. Certain selected persons, a family member, for example, or a close friend perhaps, may temporarily be allowed inside. But if there's any hint of a threat, the bubble immediately seals over. Bubbles are intentionally exclusionary.

In America, Christianity has been transformed into a totally private, personal religion. Church meetings are to aggrandize self. Bible truths are kept safely at a distance, up at the pulpit. We are committed to living a bubble-secured life of our own choosing. We're narcissists, madly in love with ourselves. If unbelievers want to hide in a bubble, well, that's their problem. But believers? It shouldn't be, after all. . . (1) We should be dancing in the streets with joy because of the wonders of our salvation and the blessings that God will heap on us, telling one and all that they could be as joyful too. (2) Paul clearly expected believers to identify with the weak, suffering Savior, so that if society scorns us, so what? They scorn our Savior too. And (3), we really are expected to press on, moving continually toward maturity and perfection, and this only occurs by righteous acts and by serving Christ, which necessarily involves interacting with others.

The coronavirus outbreak should have served to puncture our bubble. It didn't. For most of us, it forced us to retreat even deeper into our bubbles – if such is possible. So now we have this national election result to live with. This nation is rapidly becoming thoroughly pagan. America's Christianity-in-name-only religion and its privatized, personal religion has been and is powerless to change anyone. As politics and culture in our nation become more chaotic, and social issues become more bizarre, to maintain personal peace and happiness, we'll just stay hidden inside our bubbles, thank you.

What exactly is wrong with the bubbled life? *Truth!* We have the false notion that truth is just a proposition that corresponds to reality. It's something to know, something to which we give intellectual assent. Well, it is that, of course, but it's more. Truth is everything that God has revealed in His Word: His doctrines and promises and His commands for us to live out. Truth has to be embodied in the life of a believer. If something is true, we must *do* something with it. If we don't or won't live out the truths of God's Word, then we're essentially denying those truths. That's not a wise thing to do with God's word. Bubbled people ignore truth.

We believers pretend that we worship God on Sunday mornings. We suppose that being entertained with music and hearing a sermon is "worship." And that God is pleased with that. After all, it's necessary to please God in some way or another, because safety in a bubble requires that we at least know that our post-mortem existence is secure. So attending weekly church worship services quite easily settles that issue. When we leave, our bubble – or rather, our bubble-protected life – remains intact.

Let's discuss worship, because it's a weak point where bubbles easily can be punctured. Sunday church services may be called "worship" by church leaders, but they certainly aren't what Paul says worship is. Paul begins his letter to the Romans by condemning pagan pantheistic worship (1:24ff). Then near the end of the letter, in Chapter 12, he succinctly describes true worship.* Let's read this passage:

“Love must be genuine. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality” (12:9-13).

Paul continues this theme in subsequent verses. What’s obvious here is that biblical worship is *doing*. Worship is others-oriented. We see that it requires a proper loving and humble attitude. And worship involves serving Christ in some meaningful way. (Paul assumes his readers know Christ’s will regarding how to serve Him.) It also involves faithful prayer. What Paul is doing here is expanding or elaborating on his statement in 12:1, **“offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship.”**

Worship in the OT involved sacrifice; but an animal was accepted as a substitute on behalf of the worshipper. We suppose that for the Christian today, Christ’s sacrifice is all we need for worship. But that’s not what Paul says here. He says we need to offer up *ourselves* in sacrifice to God in order to worship Him. We offer ourselves, he says in 12:6-8, by humbly exercising our spiritual gifts in the local body. That occurs, for example, by teaching, by serving those in need, by giving to those in need, or by encouraging those who need it. We’re not in church meetings for what we get, but what we, in humility and love, give to others.

Then Paul says in 12:9-13 that we offer ourselves to God in worship by living our daily lives, all thru the week, showing love to others in the ways listed. These are, for example, by how we treat others, by how we endure trials, by how faithfully we’re in prayer, etc. This whole passage in Romans 12:1-13 describes what true worship is. It’s offering our bodies “as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God.” It’s what a transformed mind does, one that understands what God’s good, pleasing and perfect will is (12:2). It grasps truth.

Bubbled people don’t worship in truth. And they *cannot* worship God. That’s because worship of God occurs in everyday life as we show love to others. But bubbled people love themselves. Believers living in a bubble are going to have to answer to God some day. This form of worship that Paul describes in Romans is for all Christians throughout the Church Age, wherever they are in the world and whenever. So, it doesn’t matter to us if, for example, the pagans of America have chosen to structure a neo-Marxist form of government. We’re here to worship – as God intends us to worship.

In the land of Israel are two seas. To the north there’s the Sea of Galilee. And to the south is the Dead Sea. The Sea of Galilee receives a supply of water from ice melt atop Mt. Herman to the north. Its waters then flow out by way of the Jordan R. and flow south. The Dead Sea receives its water at its north end by way of the Jordan R., but no water flows out of it. The Sea of Galilee teems with life. For millennia it supported a prosperous fishing industry. In contrast, the Dead Sea is, well, it’s dead. No fish, no frogs, no algae even. No life. It’s always been dead. The difference between the two? The one gives up its water to enrich others, the other doesn’t.

God has given believers the Holy Spirit so that we can enrich the lives of others: **“Whoever believes in me, streams of living water will flow from within him. By this he meant the Spirit”** (John 7:38-39). But this out-flowing work of the Holy Spirit doesn’t happen automatically. It requires a willingness on our part to share with others, to bless others, to impart the saving life of Christ to others. Bubbled Christians are like the Dead Sea. No living water flows out from them.

As the consequences of the election we just had unfold in the coming months and years, let us, in the church, resolve with utmost conviction to go public with the Gospel so that – hey, who knows! – spiritual revival actually might break out in our nation. God has just done a great work right before our eyes in determining this election’s outcome. We can trust Him, because everything God does is good and wise. Let’s respond appropriately.

What to do? Exit our bubbles! Then, with determined intent and by the power of the Holy Spirit, demolish the bubble. Live each moment worshipping God, living out His truths, carrying out His will. Our concern isn’t how the unbelievers of this land choose to live their sad lives, but that they might hear the Gospel, repent, and receive forgiveness, sanctification and eternal life. Why else are we here?

* Bible publishers, ignoring the Greek grammar, have obscured Paul’s discussion of worship by the way they’ve formatted Romans Chapter 12 into paragraphs and inserted misleading headings over the paragraphs. Verses 6-8 should be read as expanding on verse 2, illustrating transformed thinking using our gifts. And verses 9-13 are not admonitions, commands, or the features of a true Christian. Rather, they are examples of how love for others expresses worship of God. This unit on worship, beginning at 12:1, is the proper response to our glorious God discussed in Chapters 9-11, ending with the great hymn of praise at the end of Chapter 11.