

Not A Working Number

by Tom Wacaster

How many times have you dialed what you thought was a correct telephone number, only to hear a taped message which says, "The number you have reached is not a working number. Please check your number and dial again." I think the telephone companies developed this automated operator to more effectively deal with the great number of "wrong numbers" that are dialed every day and to avoid having to personally confront those who might insist they simply did not dial a wrong number, all the evidence notwithstanding to the contrary. You can't argue with a recording, nor can you deny the undeniable: "You have reached a number that is not a working number." But misdialed numbers and impersonal recordings can, and do teach us some important lessons.

First, wrong numbers don't work. You may get a recording or speak to a stranger, but you will not reach your intended party. Second, sincerity does not overrule error. I have not yet heard a recording wherein the operator tells me that my number was misdialed, but because I was honest and sincere in my error they will go ahead and put the call through anyway. Third, it takes only a small percentage of error to render the number you dialed ineffective. A long distance call usually consists of 10 digits. It takes only 10% error to render the call completely ineffective. One number out of ten will render your call futile and vain. There are NO exceptions to this rule. Fourth, most (if not all) who reach a "non-working" number do not repeat the same mistake. We either correct the error, or we redial more cautiously to make sure we hit the proper buttons. Fifth, there is a standard whereby I can come to a knowledge of the correct number. Information, or a telephone book, may be consulted in order to correct the error.

It is somewhat curious that certain truths learned and applied in the world of technology are either ignored or rejected outright when it comes to matters of religion. Truth and error cannot coincide, and the consequences of error in spiritual matters have eternal consequences. But for some reason, misinformed folks think that you can use a "non-working number," and still get the same results as you would with the truth. But when it comes to spiritual matters, the Bible teaches us the following.

First, wrong numbers don't work. It is truth that sets us free (John 8:32). Any gospel other than that which was preached and delivered by the apostles is a "wrong number," and will bring upon those who practice and teach the same an anathema (Gal. 1:8-9). Many a precious soul will, on the judgment day, be turned away from that eternal home, not because they failed to be religious, but because they were religiously wrong (Matt. 7:21-23).

Second, sincerity does not overrule error. Saul of Tarsus persecuted Christians with a clear conscience and in sincerity, but he was still wrong, Wrong, WRONG! While sincerity is important, it is not a talisman that will guarantee a heavenly reward when this life is over. Unfortunately many a person has bought into the lie that it makes little difference WHAT you believe so long as you are sincere in your belief and practice of that belief.

Third, it takes only a small percentage of error to render your religion vain. Jesus warned us, "In vain do they worship me, teaching as their doctrine the precepts of men" (Matthew 15:9). We must preach the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27). A glass with one drop of strychnine to 9,000 drops of pure water will still kill a man. If I were the devil I would attempt to make my "counterfeit" religion as much like the "true" religion, but would include just enough error to cause a man to lose his soul. This is precisely what the devil has done to an unsuspecting world. Unfortunately few realize that the small percentage of error that is encouched in truth will cause a man's religion to be of no value whatsoever.

Fourth, when our error is exposed and confronted, we would do well not to repeat the same mistake. Repentance demands change, and without it no man shall see God (Luke 13:3, Acts 17:30-31). The key to making that change is a love for the truth at all costs. "And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their works were evil" (John 3:19). "And with all deceit of unrighteousness for them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. For this cause God sendeth them a working of error, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be judged who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (2 Thess. 2:10-12).

Fifth, there is a standard by which I can come to a knowledge of the truth. Men are sanctified in "truth," which is the word of God (John 17:17). Like the Bereans (Acts 17:11), we must search the scriptures to determine the correctness of the "number," and validity of our religious practice. Men must abandon their human creeds, tradition, and "they said" mentality and give attention to the word of God.

In closing, consider the finality of dialing a "non-working" telephone number in comparison to the consequences of believing and following error in our religion. While a misdialed telephone number may bring upon us embarrassment, and a little inconvenience, most misdialed numbers are easily corrected and forgotten. But a "wrong number" in religion will have eternal consequences, separating us from the Father and the Son in this life, and eventually leading to eternal separation in the world to come.