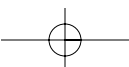


April-June 2003





Readers' Response

"How Readest Thou?" Luke 10:26

A FRIEND SHARED A COPY

Would you please add our names to your mailing list. We are very much interested in receiving the publication. A preacher friend shared a copy with us and until that time we had not heard of the *Gospel Gleaner*. Enjoyed it and thanks so much. Ben & Joyce Ferrell, Shepherdsville, KY

LOOKS FORWARD TO GETTING IT

Received the *Gospel Gleaner* and am happy you put me on your mailing list. I look forward to getting it. You are doing a good work and I appreciate you. Take care and hang-in-there. May God Bless your good works. Enclosed is a small gift to help out and to say "thank you." Betty Johnson, Lauderdale, MS.

ENJOYED GG FOR SEVERAL YEARS

I have certainly enjoyed your *Gospel Gleaner* for several years, we started getting it when Ronnie Whittemore was at Heath, KY. Since then my husband has died and I have moved. I still get the paper at my old address. Thought that I would let you know so I would get only one, however, the other one has not been wasted I pass it to someone else. You have such good articles everyone enjoys reading them. Keep up the good work, May God bless you in bringing others to Christ. Dollie Paschall, Puryear, TN.

EDIFYING ARTICLES

I have been receiving the *Gospel Gleaner* since 1992 and have truly been edified by the many articles. Thanks very much and keep up the good work. James Powell, Wetumpka, AL.

GOOD MATERIAL

I continue to appreciate the good material being made available to many through the *Gospel Gleaner*. Byron Nichols, Springfield, MO.

PLEASURABLE & EDIFYING READING

It has been pleasurable and edifying to read your publication over this past year (2002, Vol 18). I especially enjoyed the "Restoration Reachbacks" section with the articles from the preachers of yesteryear. It is amazing, but not all that surprising, that their articles are as applicable and necessary as the date they were authored. I have only been able to get your paper during some rare visits to a neighboring congregation. Please add me to your mailing list so that I may get them regularly. Also, if you have any back issues that you could send I would definitely enjoy receiving them. I understand that the subscription is free, but I would like to make a small contribution to help with this good work. Also, since I am in my beginning years of preaching I would appreciate any information you could give in submitting manuscripts for publication. Jeff Kelley, Sanford, NC.

FINE PUBLICATION

I received the *Gospel Gleaner* today and have already read all of it, and certainly enjoy receiving this fine publication. Thank you for sending it to me. Walter Lumpkin, Paragould, AR.

SCRIPTURAL MAGAZINE

Thanks for putting an article of mine in your scriptural magazine! I am a 91 year old "has been," but the best is yet to be! Hugo McCord, Vancouver, WA.

A GOOD PAPER

Thank you for your good work you do with the *Gospel Gleaner*. I have enjoyed it for a long time and do use many of the sermons found inside. They are well written and easy to preach. Again, thank you for a good paper and the work put into it. May the Lord continue to bless you in this good work. Leonard Groves, Chester, WV.

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GOSPEL GLEANER

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No.2

FOR WE BE BRETHREN

Tom Moore



You will remember from your study of the Scriptures that the herdsmen of Abraham and the herdsmen of Lot were bickering among themselves over inadequate grazing for their herds (Genesis 13:5-7). Abraham stepped in and said, "Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdsmen and thy herdsmen; for we be brethren"

(Genesis 13:8). Abraham said that there should be unity and goodwill between brethren. Abraham then in the following verse gives a solution to the problem.

Strife is forbidden in the Scriptures. "Strive not with a man without cause, if he have done thee no harm" (Proverbs 3:30). "The beginning of strife is as when one letteth out water: therefore leave off contention, before it be meddled with" (Proverbs 17:14). "It is an honour for a man to cease from strife: but every fool will be meddling" (Proverbs 20:3). "Go not forth hastily to strive, lest thou know not what to do in the end thereof, when thy neighbor hath put thee to shame" (Proverbs 25:8). "He that passeth by, and meddleth with strife belonging not to him, is like one that taketh a dog by the ears" (Proverbs 26:17). "Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying" (Romans 13:13). Strife (variance) is one of the "works of the flesh" (Galatians 5:20). "Let

nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves" (Philippians 2:3).

What causes strife among brethren? *Hatred* - "Hatred stirreth up strife" (Proverbs 10:12). We will miss heaven with this attitude (1 John 3:15). *Pride* - "Only by pride cometh contention" (Proverbs 13:10). Pride causes men to be contentious about their opinions. *The Scornful* - "Cast out the scorner, and contention shall go out; yea, strife and reproach shall cease" (Proverbs 22:10). A scorner is one who mocks or derides people, always giving people a hard time. *The Contentious In Spirit* - "Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out: so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth. As coals are to burning coals, and wood to fire; so is a contentious man to kindle strife" (Proverbs 26:20-21). Some people just love to add fuel to the fire. *Anger* - "An angry man stirreth up strife, and a furious man aboundeth in transgression" (Proverbs 29:22). The more angry a person is the less reasoning and thinking he does. *Trouble Maker* - "Surely the churning of milk bringeth forth butter, and the wringing of the nose bringeth forth blood: so the forcing of wrath bringeth forth strife" (Proverbs 30:33). There are some who are always wanting to stir up trouble - forcing wrath. *Ungodly Ambition* - "And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest" (Luke 22:24). Self-exaltation causes strife among brethren. *Refusing To Grow*
(Continued on page17)

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The *GOSPEL GLEANER* is dedicated to restoring New Testament Christianity. We welcome your comments and questions regarding any article found herein.

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Has there ever been a time when the Lord's teaching on covetousness is more needed than today? Before you finish reading this article some wealthy financier will count his profits from illegal or ill-gotten gain, some young woman will sell her body for a few dollars and some preacher will have decided to sell his soul and the souls of his hearers for a paycheck.

The tenth commandment of the Decalogue states, "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's" (Exodus 20:17). The previous nine commandments deal with outward actions. The tenth deals with the inward thoughts. Covetousness is a sin of the heart.

Covetousness is from the Greek word *pleonexia*, meaning, "to fix the desire upon...whether things good or bad; hence, to long for, lust after, covet" (*Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* [1966], Vol. 1, p. 266). In ancient Greek culture it was a common word basically meaning "arrogant greediness." In sacred history it was the first sin in the garden of Eden with Adam; it was the first sin of Israelite occupied Canaan with Achan; it was the first in the the Jerusalem church with Ananias, and it crept by stealth into the circle of Jesus' own disciples with Judas Iscariot.

Covetousness is the common, but "respectable" sin of our age. It is common, but rare indeed is the person who will ever admit to being covetousness. It is respectable in that covetous men are sometimes found in positions of leadership and authority in the Lord's church, contrary to the qualifications for elders (1 Timothy 3:3).

Covetousness is an older word that occurs more often in the King James Version of the Bible than in other translations (Mark 7:22; Luke 12:15; Romans 1:29; *et al*). In the Hebrew language it basically means "dishonest gain" (Exodus 18:21). To covet is to desire something that belongs to someone else. It is also to desire something or someone to which one has no right (Exodus 20:17; Joshua 7:21).

By way of contrast to the sin implied in the word, it is sometimes used in a good sense as when Paul told the Corinthian church to "covet earnestly the best gifts" (1 Corinthians 12:31), and to covet prophecy (1 Corinthians 14:39). We sometimes say to our brethren, "I covet your prayers."

There are different kinds of covetousness. First, there is covetousness for material things, money and for the things which money can buy (1 Timothy 6:10). Second, there is covetousness of status or position (Luke 22:24). Third, there is the benefit that false teachers receive in promoting their own covetous schemes (2 Peter 2:3). Paul was not of that stripe (1 Thessalonians 2:5). Fourth, there is covetousness for persons (Matthew 5:28). The very essence of covetousness is the desire to have what is forbidden. It is the giving of rein to desires that violate the laws of God and man (Ephesians 4:19; 5:3; Colossians 3:5). Fifth, there is



covetousness for power (Acts 8:18-19).

For the purposes of this article I will refer to covetousness as a criminal. The work of a criminal is well known. Jesus said, "The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). What are the crimes of covetousness?

COVETOUSNESS STEALS DEVOTION TO GOD

Paul twice names covetousness as equal to idolatry (Ephesians 5:5; Colossians 3:5). Idolatry is putting something else in the position which God alone should occupy (Exodus 20:3; 1 John 5:21). If one's sole desire is to obey God he will not replace Him with things. If God is given His proper place, things will have their proper place. In the words of Augustine, "Let not these occupy my soul; let God rather occupy it" (Confessions, x.51).

A dime is a small coin, but if it is held close to the eye it will block out one's vision of the sun. When one is covetous he loses sight of God in his desire to get more.

COVETOUSNESS KILLS DESIRE FOR CHRIST

The rich young ruler found a roadblock on his path to eternal life that robbed him of the Savior (Matthew 19:16-22). Even though the word covetousness is not used in this passage, its effect is clearly seen. Jesus taught the power of the "care of this world and the deceitfulness of riches" to choke the word from our lives (Matthew 13:22).

The word choke has many definitions, but in this parable it means to suffocate. The thorns that kill one's desire for Christ ["the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches" (Matthew 13:22); "the lusts of other things" (Mark 4:19), and, "pleasures of this life" (Luke 8:14)] represent those individuals with divided loyalties toward Christ (Matthew 6:24).

COVETOUSNESS DESTROYS PROPER PRIORITIES

The rich farmer in Jesus' parable lost all sense of priority in his life (Luke 12:16-21). His crops went from being his living to being his life. He traded real gold for fool's gold. Thus, Jesus introduced this parable with the

warning, "Take heed and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Vs. 15).

It should be noted that the acquiring of things is necessary for life. It is by the wise acquiring of things that we support our dependents and ourselves. Without acquisitiveness we become lazy and shiftless creatures (2 Thessalonians 3:6-10). But, when acquisitiveness gets out of proportion it becomes covetousness (Luke 12:21). Covetousness is the sin of thinking more of getting than of giving (Acts 20:35).

COVETOUSNESS COUNTERFEITS HAPPINESS

Solomon wrote, "He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase: this is also vanity" (Ecclesiastes 5:10). At the heart of covetousness is the idea that things bring happiness. It says, "If I had this thing, I would be happy." Epicurus once said, "If you want to make a man happy, add not to his possessions, but take away from his desires." If possession of things brought happiness this would be the happiest age in history.

This is not to say that things do not matter. To have enough to eat, a good home and reasonable comforts are the things for which we all strive (1 Timothy 5:8). If we don't have we can't help others (Luke 19:8; Ephesians 4:28). It is to say, however, that happiness is not wrapped up in these things (Philippians 4:11; 1 Timothy 6:8; Hebrews 13:5).

CONCLUSION

There are two kinds of relationships in this world: First, there is the "I-it" relationship that we have with things. This is where covetousness thrives. Second, there is the "I-thou" relationship that we have with God, others and ourselves. Contentment is not found in the "I-it" relationship. It can only be found in the "I-thou" relationship. If these things are what they ought to be we will covet nothing - there will be nothing to desire that we do not already possess.—10822 Mabelvale West Road, Mabelvale, AR 72103



A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH

Guy F. Hester



choices we make.

Why did the omnipotent and omniscient God, who wants man to be good, make man so that he could choose evil? It is true that God wants all men to be good, but good that is chosen is the highest and best goodness that there is or can be. In order for a man to choose to be good, there must be power and freedom to choose evil. What virtue is there in obeying God if in our nature there is no inclination to do otherwise.

Man is guided by his will, not blind instinct. One of the sad things about man is that he sins. One of the great things about man is that he is capable of sinning. Man chooses between good and evil, there can be no neutrality. Jesus said, "He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad" (Matthew 12:30). Our decisions decide our destinies; they are, as far as we are concerned, a matter of life and death!

What are some of the decisions that we are faced with in this life that are a matter of eternal life or eternal death? Let us notice just a few..

A CHOICE OF MASTERS, GOD OR MAMMON. "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matthew 6:24). We can choose God, the one who has the power to give or take life. The one who provides us with every good thing that we enjoy in this life (James 1:17). We can choose Him, before whom we all must stand and give an account in the day of judgment (2 Corinthians 5:10). Or, we can choose mammon. Mammon is a word which means riches, that part which remains when we depart this life.

The Lord God commanded the prophet Jeremiah, "And unto this people thou shalt say, Thus saith the Lord; Behold, I set before you the way of life, and the way of death" (Jeremiah 21:8). God has given unto mankind the power of choice with its privileges and responsibilities, as well as the consequences of the

Paul said, "For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out" (1 Timothy 6:7). You have never seen a hearse pulling a U-Haul.

Money can buy almost anything, but it can't buy happiness nor a clear conscience. Money can pay our fare to almost any place we want to go, but Heaven. We must not trust in riches. Paul went on to say, "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy" (1 Timothy 6:17). Riches choke out God's word (Matthew 13:22).

THE CHOICE OF WAYS, THE STRAIT AND NARROW OR THE BROAD WAY. Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Matthew 7:13-14).

Every one of us is traveling in one of these two ways. The way is narrow in contrast to many ways that are wrong. Though the way is narrow it is wide enough for all to enter in through Christ. He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). The way is strait because it demands deliberate choice and discipline. The Lord said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matthew 16:24).

The broad way is the way of indifference and indulgence. It requires no fight. Christians are told, "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses" (1 Timothy 6:12). It requires no diligence (2 Peter 1:5-11). The broad way requires no running, but we must "run with patience the race that is set before us." The Hebrew writer said, "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before

him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:1-2).

A CHOICE OF FOUNDATIONS, ROCK OR SAND. Again, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, “Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it” (Matthew 7:24-27).

The rock foundation is the way of obedience and steadfastness. It suggests the idea of hearing and doing. We are commanded, “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves” (James 1:22). This foundation is Christ Himself (1 Corinthians 3:11).

In contrast, the sand foundation is the way of folly, self-deception, and ruin. This would be those who only have a pretense of religion, or those who are rendering lip service only (Matthew 15:8-9). According to our Lord, we can honor Him with our lips and yet our hearts be far from Him.

A CHOICE OF KINGDOMS, CHRIST’S OR SATAN’S. Paul said, “Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son” (Colossians 1:13). All who have been translated into the Kingdom of Christ are in His church because they are one and the same (Matthew 16:13-18). This is an unshakable kingdom (Hebrews 12:28). This is the kingdom that, when Jesus comes again, He will deliver up to God the Father (1 Corinthians 15:24-26).

We have before us *The way of life and the way of death!* You must make a choice—right now you are choosing life or death, heaven or hell—which will it be? —E-mail: g.hester@juno.com

*Most footprints in the sands of time
were made by work shoes*

THE COMPLAINER

W. E. Vine in the *Expositor’s Dictionary of New Testament Words* lists a word found only one time in the New Testament. It is the Greek word *mempsimoiros*, which is translated “complainer.” “These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their lusts (and their mouth speaketh great swelling words), showing respect of persons for the sake of advantage” (Jude 16).

It comes from two words, *memphomai*, “to blame,” and *moira*, “a fate, lot.” Hence, the complainer blamed those around him for his unhappy lot in life.

We all know that there are things in life that need correcting and changing. We appreciate the person who loves us enough to point out things that would improve our character. Most of the time we can recognize a genuine complaint that is given in the spirit of love and for the sake of improvement. It is sad, however, when we become noted for complaining, for always playing the role of pointing out deficiencies, exposing faults, showing wrongs, complaining of slights, and telling in general how bad our lot is.

The church is not without her complainers. We should each take a close look at our own lives and see if our conversation concerning the church is more complaint or compliment. It reveals something to us if most of our talk at home and to other brethren is complaint—nothing is right, everything is wrong.

“No one is friendly up there!”

“All they’re interested in is money.”

“The classes are juvenile and the teachers are boring.”

“The sermons are too long.”

“They always sing old songs.”

“They always sing new songs.”

Let’s be honest with ourselves and see if we have fallen into the role of the “complainer.”

“Finally, brethren...whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things” (Philippians 4:8).—*Glad Tidings Of Good Things*, March 6, 1996, Jacksonville Church of Christ, PO Box 520, Jacksonville, AL 36265

WHAT'S ON YOUR MIND? (1 Timothy 4:13-16)

Allen Webster



4:15).

WHAT IS MEDITATION? In Eastern mysticism, Yoga, and Transcendental Meditation, meditation refers to a passive state of “emptying the mind.” In the Bible, meditation is active. It involves concentration, alertness, and energy. The Old Testament word *muse* is a synonym for “meditate.” It literally means to “mutter” as when working on a problem (cf. Hannah, 1 Samuel 1:12-16). The word *meditate* is used only twice in the New Testament (here; Luke 21:14). The verb (*meletao*¹) means, “to attend to” (A-S) or “imagine” (Strong). A more vivid definition is “to revolve in the mind” (like a display in a jewelry store). In 4:14, Paul says to Timothy, “Don’t be careless about the gift² you received.” In 4:15 he says, “Be constantly careful about these things.” The English word *meditation* literally means, “to be in the midst of something” (just the opposite of mystic withdrawal). The second clause of 4:15, “Give thyself wholly to them,” literally reads, “Be in these things” (Acts 6:4; 1 Corinthians 16:15; 2 Corinthians 8:5; Titus 2:14), and could be paraphrased “be absorbed in them.”

UPON WHAT SHOULD CHRISTIANS MEDITATE? Our thoughts will be filled with something (cf. sports, boyfriend, spouse, making money, grandchildren). What are my free-time (daydreaming) thoughts about during an average day? Do spiritual things find their way into my heart and speech constantly, occasionally, or rarely (read Luke 6:45)?

Christians should meditate upon the loving-kindness of God (Psalm 63:3, 6, 7). “Under his wings” is a reference to the temple’s Most Holy Place that housed the Ark of the Covenant. Overshadowing the ark were two cherubim with outspread wings. This was the place of God’s presence. Only the High Priest could enter the Most Holy Place, and

that only once a year. But David said that God’s faithful child could enter the “Most Holy Place” of God’s presence at any time and stay as long as he wanted. We live under the “shadow of His wings.”

Christians should meditate upon the labor of God (Psalm 77:11-12). We can look up at God’s handiwork and see God’s hand (Psalm 19:1).³ Our meditation comes from a thirst for God (Psalm 143:5-6). Christians should remember that they have been delivered from bondage (cf. Deuteronomy 5:15; 1 Corinthians 11:23-32).

Christians should meditate upon the Law of God (Joshua 1:8;⁴ Psalm 1:2; 119:15, 23, 48, 78, 97-99). This is both constructive and preventive.

Christians should meditate upon the lovely things of life (Philippians 4:8). The word think (*logizomia*) means, “to make a reckoning as on a ledger” or to “by all means consider.” We grow like our thoughts; we cannot entertain impure thoughts without being corrupt, and we cannot think good thoughts without being better. Meditation precedes; works follow. Honest (*semnos*) means “reverend, venerable, grave, or serious.” Lovely (*prospiles*, only here in the New Testament) means “pleasing” or “agreeable.” Of good report (*euphemos*, also only here in NT) literally means, “to say well.” Virtue (*arete*) is found nowhere else in Paul’s letters and in only two other New Testament references (1 Peter 2:9; 2 Peter 1:3).

WHAT EFFECT WILL MEDITATING HAVE UPON OUR SPIRITUAL LIVES? *It will set our souls on fire* (Psalm 39:3; Jeremiah 20:9; Luke 24:32). Meditation upon a wrong done will set a soul on fire with revenge (Romans 12:19-20). Meditation upon the possessions and talents of others may set a soul on fire with jealousy (Proverbs 27:4). Meditate upon filth and the soul will burn with lust (1 Peter 2:11). Meditate upon the truth, and the fires of love and zeal will be kindled (Titus 2:14). The fires that build us up or destroy us are lit in the soul, fanned by meditation. The flame matches the musing involved. Hearts on fire are made bold. Paul’s heart was “stirred within him” when he meditated upon the idolatry of Athens (Acts 17:16). *Stirred*⁵ means “provoked,” “aroused,” or “greatly distressed.” In the next chapter, Paul is pressed (*synecho*) (18:5) in the spirit which means “held together.” The

whole phrase could be translated “constrained by the Word” (cf. Acts 4:20; 1 Corinthians 9:16-17; 2 Corinthians 5:13-15).

It will make us glad (Psalm 104:33-34).

It will strengthen our souls (Acts 20:32). A bee’s simply touching a flower doesn’t put honey on our table; it must go deeply inside to draw out sweet nectar. Likewise it is not necessarily the one who reads the Bible the most, but the one who prays and meditates upon divine truths the most that will be the strongest Christian. Meditation makes Christianity real—it takes it out of the realm of the theory into the realm of practicality. The subconscious mind is a fire-less cooker where ideas simmer while we “loaf.” Newton was loafing when he saw an apple fall and “discovered” gravity. While finding peace for his soul, Galileo watched a lamp swing and got the idea of the pendulum swinging as a means of measuring time’s passage. While relaxing in the kitchen, Watt saw steam lift a teakettle lid and conceived the steam engine. We, too, may get more out of two hours of meditation than fourteen sermons. (We still need the sermons!)

It will make our “profiting appear to all” (4:15; cf. 4:6; Matthew 5:16; Philippians 2:15-16). Profit (*prokope*⁶) means “a cutting forward; an advance.” It could be translated “progress.” When we spend time meditating upon the Word, others will notice our “advancing.”

“Let the words of my mouth, and the mediation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my Redeemer” (Psalm 19:14).—PO Box 520, Jacksonville, AL 36265

Endnotes

¹ From *melete*, “care;” the stem of the verb is *melo*, “to care for.” In 4:14 “neglect” is the verb *amelo*. Thus there is a play on words in the Greek which is lost in English.

² Perhaps the “gift” (Greek, *charisma*) of prophecy, or prophetic preaching.

³ Declare (*caphar*) means “to score with a mark as a tally or record, by implication to inscribe;” showeth (*nagad*) means “to front, i.e. stand boldly out opposite; to announce.”

⁴ Depart (*muwsh*) means to “recede.”

⁵ *Paraxyno*, only here and 1 Corinthians 13:5.

⁶ Aside from this passage it occurs only in Philippians 1:12, 25, where it is rendered “furtherance.”

THE KIND OF CHURCH THE WORLD LIKES

Bill Dillon

The world and the church have always been “at odds” but there is a church the world likes:

1) A church that has an honorable reputation (Revelation 3:1).

2) A church untroubled by inward heresy, or outward opposition (Galatians 2:4-5).

3) A church well spoken of by outsiders (Luke 6:26).

4) A church that winks at moral evils in the community like gambling, drinking, drugs, and others. The church that “rolls over and plays dead” to the world’s demands is dead in God’s sight (Revelation 3:1-2).

5) A church that pulls punches in preaching the word (2 Timothy 4:1-4).

6) A church whose members live like those in the world (2 Corinthians 6:17-18).

7) A church that doesn’t practice discipline and withdrawal of fellowship from the disorderly (1 Corinthians 5:1-13).

8) A church that compromises the truth on alcohol and gambling, for fear of offending sinners (Mark 16:15-16; Galatians 3:26-27). Jesus said, “Upon this rock I will build my church” (Matthew 16:18). “The churches of Christ salute you” (Romans 16:16).—*Mountain Home Messenger* (January 9, 2002)

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WHY IS NOTHING SECURE?

John T. Polk II



What can "the gospel" do with so much turmoil and trouble unraveling lives?

The world has always tended toward the chaotic, since created mankind sinned in it (Genesis 1:31; 3:9-19). It is God of whom it is said: "You have made the earth tremble; You have broken it; Heal its breaches, for it is shaking" (Psalm 60:2). And occasionally, when someone, who seemed to have the world at his feet, is taken down, humanity "will gaze at you, [And] consider you, [saying: 'Is] this the man who made the earth tremble, who shook kingdoms...?" (Isaiah 14:16). Our personal worlds are shaken by what once seemed unshakable: divorce (no parental constant), home abuses (no personal protected "space"), abortion (no maternal love and devotion to each child), company "downsizing" (no income constant), wars and crime (no safety constant). In fact, police and metal detectors in schools, militia presence and intimate searches in airports, stacks of quadruplicate forms in pharmacies, mountains of government regulations on marketable items all prove one thing: people do not trust people to do right. Our own personal safety has become our focus instead of helping others. From the Second Amendment, U.S. Constitution of 1791 which said, "A well-regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed" to Police & Fire Departments in every community; from locks on house doors and windows to computer virus detectors & Internet firewalls; of this we may be certain: there is nothing on earth of which we may be totally certain!

WHY IS "SECURITY" NOT SECURE? People want to hear "security," whether truth and facts are on their side or not. This is reflected in the following:

Mohammed Saeed al-Sahhaf, the "Iraqi Information Minister," as American tanks rumbled into Baghdad, was telling many microphones, "We are in control," he said. "They are in a state of hysteria. Losers, they think that by killing civilians and trying to distort the feelings of the

people they will win. I think they will not win..." Safwan Intaher, a legal researcher who was relaxing after work on Monday at a coffee shop in downtown Cairo, Egypt, said: "He makes us feel better." (From Knight-Ridder Newspapers, Washington Bureau, April 8, 2003) Al-Sahhaf disappeared from the public April 8, 2003. Other "Sahhaf-isms:"

"They're not even [within] 100 miles [of Baghdad]. They are not in any place. They hold no place in Iraq. This is an illusion... they are trying to sell to the others an illusion."

"We made them drink poison last night and Saddam Hussein's soldiers and his great forces gave the Americans a lesson which will not be forgotten by history. Truly."

"No! We have retaken the airport! There are no Americans there! I will take you there and show you! In one hour!"

"Their forces committed suicide by the hundreds...The battle is very fierce and God made us victorious. The fighting continues."

"Yesterday, we slaughtered them and we will continue to slaughter them."

The Devil falsely guarantees: no fault sin (Genesis 3:4, 9-19); guardian angels to protect from life's dangers (Matthew 4:5-7 [Psalm 91:11-12]); or that "godliness is a means of gain" (I Timothy 6:5-6); that there will be no final Day of Judgment (Acts 17:30-31). Because people see only "surface" security, they completely ignore the truth spoken by our Creator's word. "There is no truth in" the Devil, and all who lie are his children, not God's children (John 8:44-47).

MORE WORLDLY EXAMPLES SHOW INSECURITIES: "Entertainment" is derived from TV programs which graphically depict the agony of rejection most school children and adults try to avoid (e.g. types like "Survivor," "Bachelor," "Bachelorette," "Married by"). It is ludicrous to think a solid "relationship" of any worth can be based upon one in a couple only being glad not to be rejected by the other couple member! This makes it fear-based, not a giving relationship. However God's Word says: "Love has

been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love. We love Him because He first loved us" (1 John 4:17-19 NKJV). The only secure human relationships are those grounded in love as God intended it to be (Matthew 19:1-10; Colossians 3:18-25).

Politically, representatives who uphold Federal/State Government control over every aspect of life are elected by people who will: remain a "voting bloc" continually frightened by threats to deplete and/or shake-up Social Security; tolerate intrusive personal searches at airports and schools; pay for cars having a plethora of mandated self-limiting equipment; desire total regulation of air, water and food; let government and/or insurance companies determine health-treatments and medications-all "guarantees of health and safety." However God's Word says: "There is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God" (Romans 13:1); "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29); and Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar learned "the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses." (Daniel 4:32). All government programs and medical schemes that obscure God's hand from the peoples' sight are Devil-centered and not God-centered.

Societally, people: buy armloads of insurance policies for material possessions and lives; load courts with lottery-like litigation; want government doles and minimum wage increases without work; expect passing school grades without learning, and undeserved scholarships. They all seek one goal: material security. However God's Word says: Jesus said, "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses" (Luke 12:15). God decreed men should work for a living (Genesis 3:19); share with the needy (Ephesians 4:28); and refuse to support the lazy (2 Thessalonians 3:10). Reward without earning it destroys self-esteem and society! In Matthew 6:19-21 Jesus taught that earth's treasures cannot be completely protected on earth. The only lasting investment is what is given in

heavenly service. Economic "ups and downs" are man-made, but heavenly investments have only "ups."

Religiously, some mistakenly use (1) wars and rumors of wars to signal the end of the world; (2) "once-saved-always-saved" to teach a "security of the soul"; (3) material prosperity to secure one's spirituality and God's blessing; (4) "heroic deaths" to secure salvation in eternity; (5) worshiping God to entertain humans. However God's Word says: (1) The End and Judgment will come unexpectedly (1 Thessalonians 5:1-4); (2) practicing righteousness (known as "obedience") makes one born again (1 John 2:29; 3:7; Romans 16:25-27); (3) material gain is not godliness (1 Timothy 6:5-10); (4) not dying for someone else, but appropriating Christ's death for one's own self gives hope in eternity (John 15:12-14; Hebrews 5:8-9; Romans 6:1-12); (5) "spirit and truth" rule (John 4:24; Colossians 3:16-17; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; 1 Thessalonians 2:4).

THERE IS NO SECURITY WITHOUT GOD. Religious and government leaders ordered Jesus' tomb to be made "as secure as you know how" (Matthew 27:62-66), but to no avail (Matthew 28:1-6). Government leaders surround themselves with "defenders" yet know no true security (Job 24:22-24). General Douglas MacArthur (1880-1964) said: "There is no security on this earth, there is only opportunity." Job said life's uncertainties are in God's hand, whether a person is weak or strong (Job 21:22-26, Cf. verse 30).

Without God, there is no guarantee of tomorrow (Proverbs 27:1), continued jobs or business (James 4:13-17), good health and prosperity (Luke 12:16-23), or salvation (2 Thessalonians 1:7-10).

The only true security lies in the fulfilled covenant and promise God made to Abraham, which gives hope for now and in the hereafter to those whose obedience places them "in Christ" (Galatians 3:15-29; Hebrews 6:9-10; 10:19-31; 12:1-11). This gives security of the soul, not soil, that regardless of events on earth which may jeopardize life or cause death, one's soul is committed to God (Luke 23:46; Mark 10:28-30). Paul declared, "godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come" (1 Timothy 4:8). —125 The Trace, Dover, TN 37058

SINFUL NATURE?

Owen D. Olbricht



Is man born with a sinful nature? Did human nature become corrupted and sinful because of the sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden?

The New International Version (NIV) and its recent revision, *Today's New International Version* (TNIV), interpolate without justification, "sinful nature," into the biblical text,

a theological statement instead of a translation. In these versions the Greek word *sarx*, meaning "flesh," is rendered "sinful nature" in the following passages (Romans 7:5, 18, 25; 8:3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13; 13:14; 1 Corinthians 5:5; Galatians 5:13, 16, 17, 19, 24; 6:8; Ephesians 2:3, 11; Colossians 2:11; 2 Peter 2:10, 18).

Sarx appears in the Greek New Testament around 151 times. In most of these passages, "sinful nature," could not possibly be the meaning. Jesus became *sarx*, "flesh" (John 1:14); his "flesh" is our bread of life (John 6:51), which we must (spiritually) eat to have life (John 6:53-56). Jesus' "flesh" did not see corruption (Acts 2:31). He was a descendent of David (Romans 1:3) and the patriarchs according to the "flesh" (Romans 9:5). Jesus was God revealed in the "flesh" (1 Timothy 3:16) and was put to death in the "flesh" (1 Peter 3:18). Why not use "sinful nature" in these passages if this can be the meaning of *sarx*?

When *sarx* is used to refer to the earthly nature of man, it means his "fleshly passions," which can be either good (Acts 2:26) or bad (Romans 8:7). Because these passions generally include evil purposes, the most frequent meaning, when this occurs, is the negative aspects of these passions.

Even though *sarx* has various meanings, such as, physical tissue, the fleshly body, mankind in general, fleshly passions, etc., not one major Greek lexicon, dictionary, or encyclopedia defines it, "sinful nature." The closest possible reference to a "sinful nature" is Paul's statement, "sinful passions" (Romans 7:5). He did not write, sinful "flesh," *sarx*, but sinful "passions" *pathemata*. The "Law," not the "flesh," is what aroused the "sinful passions" by working through the members of the body.

When referring to this part of the human nature lexicons give the following definitions: "*flesh* is the

willing instrument of sin, and is subject to sin to such a degree that where flesh is, all forms of sin are likewise present, and no good thing can live in the *sarx*." In giving possible ways it can be translated, "sinful flesh," is suggested, but nowhere is "sinful nature," used.¹ "In Paul's thought especially, all parts of the body constitute the totality known as *sarx* or *flesh*, which is dominated by sin to such a degree that wherever flesh is, all forms of sin are likewise present, and no good thing can live in the *sarx*."² "Sinful flesh," but not "sinful nature" may appear in the definition in some lexicons.

In summary, after a discussion of this aspect of "flesh," Schweizer wrote, "Hence the flesh is not a sphere which is to be differentiated from other earthly things and which is intrinsically bad or especially dangerous. It becomes bad only when man builds his life on it."³

McDonald correctly observed, "Yet, 'flesh'—*sarx*—is not a mere name for man's weakness as a creature of God. True, the flesh is corruptible (1 Corinthians 15:53, KJV) and subject to death (2 Corinthians 10:2). Nonetheless, Paul gives a more positive ethical content to his idea of *sarx*. Thus, while flesh is not sinful, it is that part of man's nature which gives sin its opportunity. It provides sin with its ready basis of operation. *Sarx* is that element in man upon which sin impinges and to which it attaches itself. In broad sweep, then, while Paul does not teach any Gnostic notion of the essential evil of matter, he does regard the flesh as somehow permeated by the presence of evil, which issues in the 'works of the flesh' (cf. Galatians 5:19; etc.)."⁴

The problem with giving *sarx* the meaning "sinful nature" is that this is a theological expression on which a false doctrine is built, that man is born with a sinful nature because of the sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Instead of flaunting their nakedness because of a corruption in their nature, they realized their nakedness and covered themselves (Genesis 3:7-10). When they ate, their blindness to morality ended and they became like God, knowing good and evil (Genesis 3:22).

Anyone can corrupt the goodness of his nature, but no one is born with a "sinful nature." "Truly, this only I have found, that God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes" (Ecclesiastes 7:29, NKJV).

Endnotes

¹ “sarx” F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 2nd edition, based on revision of Walter Bauer’s 5th edition (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), 744.

² “sarx,” Frederick W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 3rd edition, based of Walter Bauer’s 6th edition (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 915.

³ “sarx,” Eduard Wchweizer, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. VII, Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich editors, translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co. 1971), 135.

⁴ H. Dermont McDonald, *Commentary on Colossians & Philemon* (Waco, TX: World Books, 1980), 102.

The Bible is a record of the struggle of twice-born men to live in a world run by the once-born.

—A. W. Tozer

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THE SIN OF A BAD ATTITUDE

Bill Dillon

Men and women of God who would not think of gambling, drinking or committing an act of fleshly evil, may otherwise be guilty of a sour disposition with an envious, bitter or negative frame of mind. An individual may quote scripture, pray fervently and have an unblemished attendance record at worship services, yet may possess such a critical and negative attitude about life that others actually wish to avoid them.

Are sins of the flesh less harmful than sins of the spirit? The sin of a bad attitude can cripple, if not kill, the progress of the Lord’s church in any community.

A weak brother may have the foulest, most profane tongue of anyone in the town and the church would not want him to serve publicly in the worship assembly. Rightly so! But if a brother has a sour spirit and is known to be a habitual discourager of others, he shall be used!!!

Regardless of daily news, sorrowful circumstances, or stormy weather, each of us has a duty to show ourselves true men and women of God and be of good cheer.

The Bible says:

“...greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

“For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?” (1 John 5:4-5).

Jesus also said, “In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

May our faith in God cause us always to see all circumstances in as favorable a light as possible and let us have a happy readiness to go onward in life.—PO Box 232, Hickory Ridge, AR 72347

THE CHAMPION’S CREED

I am not judged by the number of times I fail, but by the number of times I succeed. And the number of times I succeed is in direct proportion to the number of times I can fail and keep trying!—Tom Hopkins



THEOLOGY VERSUS THE GOSPEL

Earl I. West



The religious world has much to say about "theology." This word, coming from the Greek words *theos* meaning "God" and *logos* meaning "word" or "study" literally indicates nothing more than a "study of God." Innocent as this may appear, however, the word in its modern usage carries a number of implications that are subversive and contradictory to the whole spirit of the New Testament gospel. Beneath the surface and primary meaning of the word there is carried the idea of speculations and philosophies about God originating with man. This subtle evil is in sharp contrast to the word "gospel," for this word, from the Greek *euangelion*, means literally "good news." The gospel is the good news which is centered in Christ; it is the news of our salvation and redemption in Jesus.

THE DIFFERENCE. Walter Scott, outstanding pioneer preacher of a hundred years ago, put the difference between "theology" and "the gospel" like this: "The preaching of the gospel is the preaching of the effects, commands, promises of and about Christ. Theology, on the other hand, is the speculation about these facts."

When one preaches the gospel, he tells men that Jesus died for our sins; when he preaches theology he speculates as to how the death of Christ brought about the redemption from sins. Preaching the gospel, he tells sinners it is for the remission of sins; preaching theology he speculates as to how this is done. Preaching the gospel, he quotes the scriptures as the final authority for his statements; preaching theology, he enjoys quoting from the philosophers and theologians.

There, briefly, is the difference between the two. The one is a preaching of what the Bible says; the other a preaching of human speculations about what the Bible says. The one is calculated to move men to obey the gospel and be saved. The other is a device by which man

"reasons" himself out of doing what God says.

AN AUTHORITATIVE RELIGION. It is basic to the understanding of the scriptures to recognize that the religion of Jehovah has always been an authoritative religion. God is invested with all authority, his rule is not to be questioned. He must be obeyed, not merely speculated about. Men must submit to him for no other reason than that he is God.

In the Old Testament Jehovah sought to impress his people with the fact and absoluteness of his authority. Man was to have dominion over everything—except man! God reserved for himself the dominion over man.

A tree of knowledge of good and evil was placed in the Garden of Eden. Man was told not to eat of the fruit of that particular tree. God gave no reasons for the prohibition, so the power behind the command lay wholly in the person of God. Obedience to the law would indicate man's respect for God; disobedience his disrespect. Obedience or disobedience always denotes the attitude of mind and heart.

Abraham, in Ur of Chaldea, was commanded to leave Ur and go into a land which God would show him. No reason was given for the command. It had promises attached to it, but God gave no explanation as to why he wanted Abraham to go into a strange country. Similar dealings were had with all the patriarchs.

AUTHORITY INVESTED IN MOSES. In setting up national Israel, God gave authority to Moses, requiring the people to follow him fully. "And Jehovah said unto Moses, Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud that the people may hear when I speak with thee, and may also believe thee forever" (Exodus 19:9). Jehovah purposed to convince the people that he was working through Moses, and that they should in no way doubt or question any law which Moses might give. He did not intend to prove or explain every command; he did not expect to give the reasons he might have behind each requirement; no angel from heaven would come to demonstrate to each Israelite that God had

such and such reasons for demanding such and such actions. The only proposition God wanted to demonstrate was that he was working through Moses—let no man doubt or question that!

“Certain sons of Korah rose up before Moses, with certain of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty princes of the congregation, called to the assembly, men of renown; and they assembled themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them, Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and Jehovah is among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the assembly of Jehovah?” (Numbers 16:1-3). This was rebellion. It was rebellion against God. The guilty ones were punished by destruction. No other course would have been logical or possible.

MOSES AND CHRIST. Turning from the Old Testament to the New we discover that the supremacy of Moses as an authority was to be discontinued and superseded by the counterpart of Moses, Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The “law” came by Moses; grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. The significance of the Transfiguration scene is to be found in the fact that Jesus was supreme over Moses and Elijah, representative of the law and the prophets. “This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him,” said Jehovah (Matthew 17:5).

The conflict Christ had with the Jews arose largely out of the fact that they were insisting on a continuation of the authority of Moses, whereas Jesus was declaring that authority was not in him. A new kingdom was to be inaugurated; a new nation set up. Physical Israel was to disappear as God’s chosen people. In its place should come spiritual Israel, the church, the kingdom of Christ. The rule of Moses was ended; the authority of Christ was to be recognized as absolute and supreme.

Significantly, the only proposition which the New Testament undertakes to prove is that implied in Jesus’ question to the Pharisees, “What think ye of the Christ? whose son is he?” (Matthew 22:42). If Jesus be the son of God, then he has all authority. Men must obey him because he is God’s Son. God selected four men—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John—to write biographies of Jesus from different points of view. Each of them however

made it the chief end of his writing to prove that Jesus was the Son of God. John closed these biographical records by saying, “these are written that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in his name” (John 20:31). And Matthew quoted Christ as saying, “All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth” (Matthew 28:18).

When the disciples went out preaching from the day of Pentecost on, the message they preached was based on the authority of Christ. The expression they used, “in the name of Christ,” always denoted the authority of Christ. In the name of Jesus men and women were commanded to repent and be baptized (Acts 2:38). In the name of Jesus miracles were wrought. This was possible only because men were acting “in the name” or under the authority of Christ. In view of that the writer of Hebrews well says, “Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things that were heard, lest haply we drift away from them. For it the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? which having at the first been spoken through the Lord, was confirmed unto us by them that heard” (Hebrews 2:1-4).

ENEMY OF THE AUTHORITY OF GOD. To the authority of God the response which Jehovah has always demanded is faith and obedience. Faith is the acceptance of what God says; obedience is the acting upon this thing which has been accepted. The Christian religion is built upon a platform of faith. “For we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7). We are saved by faith—the faith which obeys God (Acts 15:9; 1 Peter 1:22). When God speaks and man believes God and does what He says, we have the substance of the religion of Jehovah; that is what it is all about.

Yet to prevent this simple obedience to God by faith, Satan has always had his devices. Human speculation and philosophy (theology) is one of these devices. When God commanded Adam not to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, he did not explain why he gave such a command. The warrant for obedience was the authority of God. The response desired was faith and
(Continued on page 23)



BLOCKING HEAVEN'S GATE

(Matthew 23:1-3)

M. W. Kiser



Is there anyone you would like to see in Hell? We would probably answer in the negative; but have we ever contributed to a person dying lost? Ungodly people often wish this upon others. Jesus brought this serious indictment against the Pharisees of His day. Let us consider how we could be guilty of doing the same.

I. BY DENYING WHAT THE BIBLE TEACHES ABOUT HELL.

- A. They deny its existence. Most who believe in God, don't believe in Hell. Most who believe in Hell don't believe there is the possibility that they will go there! The Godhead taught it (2 Peter 2:4; Matthew 5:22); Redemption implies it; Heaven suggest it; and Judgment demands it!
- B. Some would deny the Biblical explanation of:
 1. Where it is [say it is the grave] (Hebrews 10:27-29).
 2. What will be found there [torment] (Luke 16:28).
 3. How long it will last [eternity] (Mark 9:47-48).
- C. Some would deny its extent. They claim it just for the devil and his angels (Matthew 13:42, 50; 25:41; 23:15, 23; Revelation 21:8, 20:15).

II. BY BEING INDIFFERENT TOWARD SOUL WINNING.

- A. Some are indifferent toward alien sinners; failing to believe that those who die in their sins will be lost (John 8:21-24; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).
- B. Some are indifferent toward erring brethren: They can fall from grace, and unless

converted, will be lost (2 Peter 2:20-22; James 5:19-20).

- C. Some are indifferent toward their own soul. They fail to acknowledge responsibility in this matter (Romans 10:13-17; Ezekiel 3:17-21).

III. BY BEING A HYPOCRITICAL CHURCH MEMBER.

- A. The Nominal Christian. Morally good, but their personal interest comes first (Revelation 3:1; Matthew 6:33).
- B. The Worldly Christian. They look starched and ironed; but they need to be washed (1 Peter 4:14-16; 1 John 2:15-17).
- C. The Compromising Christian. He will not stand up for what he believes; High doctrine and low practice do not go together.

IV. BY FAILING TO OBEY THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST.

- A. Some probably don't obey because they are stubborn.
 1. You are telling others that it is just not important (Romans 14:7).
 2. You are saying to one and all, "I don't love Jesus" (John 14:15).
- B. Some don't obey because they have a hardened heart.
 1. They are comforted about friends being in hell (Revelation 21:8).
 2. We leave this world with a different thought (Luke 16:27-28).
- C. Some are just waiting on a better time to do it.
 1. Instead of "today," they say "someday" (2 Corinthians 6:2; Acts 24:25).
 2. Many will die with good intentions; but take others with them!

V. BY ROBBING PEOPLE OF NEEDED ENCOURAGEMENT.

- A. Some are just not sure that the Lord wants them (Matthew 11:28-30).
- B. Some are convinced they are just too sinful (1 Timothy 1:15).
- C. Some are almost persuaded. It is with them, not a matter of knowing, but of obeying. They need to know that “now” is the time (Acts 2:37-40).

I hope that none of us have been guilty of blocking the gate of heaven to someone who wants to go; for if we have, then we are guilty of helping someone be lost in hell! By turning every point around, we can help folks go to heaven. —104 Calhoun Avenue, Sylacauga, AL 35150

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PRELUDE TO REFORMATION (1)

Grady Miller



The most convenient and obvious date for the launch of the Protestant Reformation is October 31, 1517. It was on that date Martin Luther, hardly known outside the immediate circle of German churches, monasteries and universities, nailed his ninety-five thesis protesting the chief Roman Catholic fundraiser—the selling of indulgences—to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg.

If we must pick a date to mark the beginning of the Reformation Era, 1517 will do just fine. In the weeks following Luther's courageous act all Germany boiled over. The Ninety-five Thesis were printed and distributed throughout the country. The Catholic hierarchy soon realized this dispute was more than a "squabble among monks," as Pope Leo X tried to dismiss it. With Luther leading the charge in Germany, Ulrich Zwingli in Zurich, the Anabaptists in Switzerland and John Calvin in France, the totalitarian dominance of the Roman Catholic Church was broken in much of Europe. The Protestant Reformation ushered in a new day, a new age of religious freedom.

Momentous change doesn't just happen, not all at once. Lightning rarely crackles in a clear, blue sky. Instead, we see the unmistakable gathering of storm clouds, feel the freshening wind and notice the change of temperature before the thunderstorm breaks upon us. Just so, there were many important developments that precede the Protestant Reformation. There were other brave reformers in the centuries before Luther who paved the way for his work and made possible his contribution.

Many of the most important factors contributing to the success of the Reformation are beyond the scope of this study. After all, the focus of the *Gospel Gleaner* is Bible study, church history and restoration principles. Still, we need to realize that 16th century Europe was ripe for change, a radical reformation, reaching far beyond the all-important issues of religion. The Atlantic empires of

England, France and Spain were growing in power and influence, while Venice, Genoa and Milan were declining in importance. The discovery of new lands – indeed, a whole new world – opened new vistas of opportunity. New sources of revenue challenged the dominance of the landed gentry and nobility of the Old World. The nameless, faceless serf, tied to the land and kept in peasantry for centuries, began to assert his claim for dignity, individuality and independence. The Renaissance sparked increasing interest in secular concerns, and that explosion of learning, discovery and the arts stood in stark contrast to the narrow and petty agenda of church officials.

PILLAR POSTS OF THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION

This series of articles will examine three significant developments in the centuries before Martin Luther that made the Protestant Reformation possible. We may liken these developments to a foundation, upon which Luther and others built. Or, to view it another way, consider that the Reformation of the 16th Century rests upon three grand pillar posts, each one leaning upon and drawing strength from the other.

First, there is the absolute pillar of the Bible, the recognition that the authority of the Word supersedes every one and every thing. The plowman in the field, the priest in the cathedral and the Pope in Rome are all subject to this divine authority. Even more far-reaching, the plowman has as much right to read and interpret the Bible as any church official. Therefore, the Bible must be readily available, freely translated into every language, and the final arbiter of every religious question.

Second, there is the recognized and widely acknowledged corruption of the Roman Catholic Church. Reasonable men do not "protest" against that which is pure and right, or call themselves "Protestants" unless they have a just grievance against the acceptable order. There is not need to "reform" or instigate a "Reformation" unless there are abuses that need correcting.

Third, there has to be the proper climate and

prevailing conditions that make Reformation possible. Oranges will not grow in Colorado. You won't find a rosebush in the middle of a busy Interstate highway. The careful Bible student knows that Jesus came into this world only when "the fullness of the time had come" (Galatians 4:4), when everything was ripe and ready for the coming of the Messiah and the establishment of His kingdom. So, too, there were many historical developments – and, I believe, the unfolding of God's providential purpose – in those years leading up to the Protestant Reformation.

Our next installment will examine the "rediscovering" of the Word of God that made the Reformation possible.—
745 Riverview Lane, Colorado Springs, CO 80916

FOR WE BE BRETHREN
Continued from front page

As A Christian - "And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?" (1 Corinthians 3:1-3). Those who won't grow become carnal, thus cause strife. **Not Sound In Doctrine** - "If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife..." (1 Timothy 6:3-4). It is not those who stand for the truth that cause strife but those who do not. **Envy** - "For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work" (James 3:16). Envy is a great evil.

How do we prevent strife among brethren? Do our best to avoid strife - "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men" (Romans 12:18). Avoiding strife must be our goal. **Be Slow To Anger** - "A wrathful man stirreth up strife: but he that is slow to anger appeaseth strife" (Proverbs 15:18). **Study** - "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to

be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). We can do no better than we know, and we seldom do as well as we know. **Practice the "Golden Rule"** - "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them..." (Matthew 7:12). So many troubles would be solved if we would all live by this important philosophy. **Be Longsuffering** - "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; Forebearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye" (Colossians 3:12-13). **Be Peacemakers** - "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God" (Matthew 5:9). Action is required! Beloved, let us not be the cause of strife, for "we be brethren."—823 North Main Street, Malvern, AR 72104

HIGHLIGHTS FROM CHURCH HISTORY

COLUMN REVIVED

Many of our readers will remember this column which was a recent addition to *Gospel Gleaner*, featuring articles on church history by Max R. Miller. It was a short running department, ending prematurely with brother Miller's death late in 2001. Max Miller was an excellent student of the Bible who had a wonderful knowledge of church history. I remember him as being well read in all areas of history, and this was reflected in his writing. We miss him and we miss his column. It has been over a year since this department last appeared.

With this issue of *Gospel Gleaner* we are reviving the department, *Highlights From Church History*. We have invited Grady Miller to resume the work of his father in this area. Grady preaches for the Pikes Peak Church of Christ in Colorado Springs, Colorado. He was editor of *First Century Christian* from 1995, until it suspended publication at the end of 2002. Grady Miller is an excellent student of church history in his own right. His deep love for Jesus Christ and his church, along with his rich knowledge of history make Grady the logical choice to write this column. We think that you will find his articles both interesting and informative.—
Dennis Gullede, *Editor*.

WORK OF LAW

T. Pierce Brown



In Romans 2:12-15, we find a reference to ethnic groups (ethna) which did not have the law, yet did by nature the things contained in the law and were thus a law unto themselves. Then in verse 15 Paul says, “Which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another.”

Most commentaries and translations which I have checked seem to think “the work of the law” is to be understood as “the works which the law requires.” The NIV translates it as “the requirements of the law.” I think they are wrong.

The expression “the work of the law” is from the Greek, *to ergon tou nomou*, and does not mean the same as “the deeds of the law” in Romans 3:20. There are at least three reasons to conclude this. First, “work” in Romans 2:15 is singular; “deeds” in Romans 3:20 is plural. Second, the article is present in Romans 2, suggesting that Paul is talking about the Law of Moses, whereas it is not present in Romans 3, suggesting the possibility that he is talking about law in general. It is true that the absence of the article does not always mean he is not talking about the Law of Moses. Having read every case in which the article is absent, I conclude that although the Law of Moses may be indicated by the context of the verses under consideration, it is still the principles of law that are in his mind and not the specific Law of Moses itself. Third, the most significant reason I do not think “the work of the law” means “the requirements of the law” or “the works which the law demands” is because those two latter expressions simply mean “the law.” If “the requirement of the law” were written on the heart of the Gentile, he would have the law written on his heart, and would be under the law just as much as the Jew. Paul specifically denies this. It does not require a particularly astute person to realize that the Gentiles did not know the requirements of the law, either because they had them in a book or on their hearts.

Since the language specifically says, “the work of the law” let us inquire what is the work or function of the law. We can see that “the deeds of the law” are deeds which the

law requires of us. But “the work of the law” is not a work the law requires of us, but a work which the law does for us. What are some things the Law of Moses did for the Jew? First, it was a tutor to lead the Jews to Christ. Did that purpose inhere in what was written on the Gentile heart? If so, I am at a loss to see how, nor have I ever heard of a person who did. Second, the law gave a knowledge of specific things that were sins. Paul would not have known that it was a sin to covet if the law had not revealed it to him (Romans 7:7). Could that have been the thing that was written on the heart of a Gentile? I see no evidence in or out of the Bible that Gentiles were aware that it was a sin to covet. There must be some other work of the law that Paul had in mind. Is there some other thing the law did for the Jew that could be written on the heart of a Gentile? Yes, the law emphasized that man is justified in doing right and man stands condemned if he does wrong. Note that the thing that is written on his heart is not the law, which tells what is right or wrong, but “the work of the law,” or an effect of the law which causes a man to want to be justified and not condemned. There is no man, no matter how wicked, that does not seek to be justified in what he does. It is written on the heart of every man. If you had asked Hitler why he murdered the Jews or Sadaam Hussein why he invaded Kuwait, they would have sought to justify themselves because there was written on their hearts the realization that men should do right and not do wrong.

This “work of the law” is neither the law itself, “the requirements of the law” (which amounts to the same thing), nor the conscience. God also gives every man a conscience, but it is not produced by the law. But there is a thing produced by The Law of Moses (or any other specific set of laws) that was written on the heart of the Gentiles who did not have the Law of Moses. That was the sense of “oughtness” which every man has. Even an atheist admits that men ought not do many things. Without an admission of the reality of God, no one can sensibly explain why everyone in the world has a sense of “should” or “should not.” But the fact that they cannot explain it does not mean that it is not written on their hearts, for God wrote it there. Note carefully that the specific things a person should or should not do must be prescribed by law. That is not written on the heart of man. No Gentile could tell whether he should offer a bull or goat on an altar. However, he has written on his heart the sense of

moral responsibility. This is the work of the law, whether we speak of the Law of Moses or any of God's other laws. When God speaks, man has a sense of moral responsibility. That is not the only work of the law, but it is the work of the law to impress upon man a sense of moral responsibility. Without a specific law, such as the Law of Moses, God wrote that sense of moral responsibility on the heart of every man. That fact is too universally recognized to permit serious debate.

Notice how the last part of Romans 2:15 bears out this conclusion. Since the work of the law is written in their hearts—that is, since they have a sense of moral responsibility and know that the things that are right are praiseworthy and things that are wrong merit condemnation—their conscience bears witness and accuses or defends them. Every person in the world believes certain things to be right. He believes other things to be wrong. When he does that which he thinks to be right, he shows “the work of the law” written in his heart and his conscience bears witness to it, upholding or defending him. When he does that which he thinks to be wrong, he shows “the work of the law” written in his heart, and his conscience bears witness to it, accusing him or condemning him. The conscience cannot be trained to do anything different from that. It only has those two functions, and all the knowledge one may get will not change those functions. Paul had as good a conscience before he learned God's will as he did afterwards. Teaching did not affect the nature or function of his conscience. It only changed the things he considered right or wrong.

So, neither the law nor the “requirements of the law” were written in the heart of the Gentile, but “the work of the law” was. That is, they had a God-given ability to have a sense of moral responsibility. This caused them to “do by nature” (verse 14) many of the things contained in the law. It does not say, imply or suggest that the Gentiles, who have not the law, do by nature all the things contained in the law. We know that they did not. However, we know that people from any ethnic group we have observed have a sense of moral responsibility that causes them to obey many of the principles contained in the law.

Those who have that sense of “oughtness” and obey it are a law unto themselves. When they fail to do that which they understand they ought to do, they stand condemned, even by their own conscience. This should not lead one to

conclude that when anyone does what he thinks he ought to do, he is justified from his sins. We could prove that is not so in many ways. That a person may sin without the Law of Moses is clearly evident, for Paul says, “Those who sin without law shall perish without law” (Romans 2:12). For a person to do what he thinks is right in 100 cases cannot possibly pay for his guilt in doing what he thinks is wrong in another case. A man is always justified when he does what is right, but that does not mean “justified from his sins” or forgiven for having done wrong things. We err greatly when we think “justified” always means “just as if I had never sinned” or is forgiven. God is said to be justified under some circumstances (Luke 7:29), but by no stretch of imagination can it be assumed that it refers to his being forgiven of sins. However, that would take another article to deal with that subject. The point of this one is that the “work of the law” cannot mean “the things required by the law” but refers to something that the law does for the Gentile in his heart that the Law of Moses did for the Jew. The only thing that fits the picture as I view it is the sense of moral responsibility all men have.—1068 Mitchell Avenue, Cookeville, TN 38501

SPANISH EDITION PLANNED FOR THIRD QUARTER ISSUE

As we announced in our first quarter issue for 2003, we are planning a Spanish edition of *Gospel Gleaner*. The Spanish edition will be released concurrent with our regular English issue for the third quarter. It will contain the same material as our English issue. This is a wonderful opportunity for us to teach the gospel to an ever increasing Hispanic community in this country. We view this as an open door of opportunity that God has laid before us.

The theme for this issue will be: “What Think Ye Of Christ?” It will be composed of articles touching on the various aspects of the deity of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

If you, or the congregation where you worship, are engaged in a Hispanic ministry we hope you will take advantage of this opportunity. *Gospel Gleaner* is **subscription-free**. All you need to do is to let us know how many issues you can use, and we will send you a bundle. Please contact us at *Gospel Gleaner*, PO Box 345, Mabelvale, AR 72103, or, email us at mabelval@cei.net.—Dennis Gullledge, *Editor*

A UNIQUE CHURCH

Hugo McCord



the only one of its kind.

NOT UNIQUE IN LANGUAGE. The word on Jesus's lips in his promise to erect his church, *ekklesia* (a "called-out group"), was not unique, and by itself it has no religious or sacred meaning. To the Greeks a group of people "called out" for a town meeting or to see an Olympic race would be called an *ekklesia*. Luke employed the word where it is translated not "church" but "assembly." Also, just as an unlawful assembly could be styled an *ekklesia*, so a lawful assembly the Ephesian townclerk designated as an *ekklesia* (Acts 19:39). Furthermore, a large group of Israelites (called out of Egypt by Moses into a wilderness) Stephen described as an *ekklesia* (Acts 7:38, mistranslated "church" in the KJV and the ASV).

To us the word *ekklesia* becomes exceedingly important because Jesus used it to refer to those people whom he would call out of the world to live only for him (Matthew 11:26-28; 2 Corinthians 5:14-15). They would be sinners called by the gospel to a new life of righteousness (Romans 6:1-17; 2 Thessalonians 2:14). The idea Jesus presented is of the highest importance, but the word he used to set it forth was not unique.

UNIQUE IN FIVE WAYS. There are at least five ways that the New Testament church is in a realm to itself, the one of its kind.

A Display of God's Wisdom. "The eternal purpose" which God purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord for a long time "was not made known to the sons of men" (Ephesians 3:5, 11). From of old, men knew from what the prophets had said that something stupendous was coming. "Many prophets and righteous men desired to see" and to hear about what God was planning (Matthew 13:17). But no eye had seen, nor had any ear heard, and no heart had imagined the things God had "prepared for them that love him"

(Isaiah 64:4; 1 Corinthians 2:9). Prophets themselves "sought and searched diligently" to no avail until "the fulness of time" had come (Galatians 4:4; 1 Peter 1:10). Even angels were in suspense, but they were not lacking in interest. The divine plan of the ages they desired "to look into" (*parakupsai*, just as Mary "stooped and looked" into the tomb) (1 Peter 1:12; John 20:11).

That the Gentiles, also a part of God's creation and precious to him, should, along with the Jews, be "fellow-heirs, and fellow-members of the body, and fellow-partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel" was a glorious revelation (Ephesians 3:6). In due time the uncovering of the eternal purpose was made known by the Spirit to the "holy apostles and prophets" (Ephesians 3:5). Then that combined group of sinners, Jew and Gentiles, now redeemed and forgiven through the gospel, now brothers together in one family, now members of one body, the church, that unified called-out group the angels in heaven could finally see!

As a result they praised God for his matchless wisdom in effecting so glorious a prophet. As a quilt on exhibition at the state fair, displaying a lady's careful and beautiful handiwork, gives glory to its maker, so the church, without blemish and without spot, is a living exhibit of what God is able to perfect. The many strands of his divine wisdom are reflected brilliantly when one's eyes fall on the incomparable church. Nothing like it is known to man or angel.

Its Purchase Price. That combined group of called-out peoples, the whole family in heaven and on the earth, living and dead, before or after the cross, that group was paid for by the Savior's blood (Acts 20:28; Ephesians 3:15; Hebrews 9:15; 11:40). Church members have been redeemed, not by corruptible things, as silver and gold, but by the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without spot and without blemish, foreknown indeed before the foundation of the world (1 Peter 1:18-19).

In the moonlight of Gethsemane, with Jesus' face on the ground, displaying "strong crying and tears," being in "an agony," with his sweat like "great drops of blood falling down upon the ground," praying the Father who loved him to remove the impending blood-letting, nobody could ever ask, "Could God have thought of any other way to save

sinners? to buy the church?” (Matthew 26:39; Luke 22:44; Hebrews 5:7).

Truly the purchase price of the church is one of its unique features. Genuine church members praise him who loved them and washed them from their sins by his blood (Revelation 1:5). They cannot understand how an alleged Christian denomination can be so unappreciative of Calvary as to purge from its hymnals any reference to blood.

Its Membership. Church members have a quality belonging to no other organization: they are a saved group, enjoying the assurance that their sins have been forgiven. From their souls their guilt has been placed on the head of Jesus as a scapegoat. Thank God, he has carried their sins “into the wilderness” far away (Leviticus 16:20-22). A God whose word is sure has promised that their iniquities he will remember no more (Hebrews 8:12).

One does not join the church. Instead, after he is saved, the Lord adds him to that called-out group. When one has believed, repented, confessed the Savior, and has been baptized, he is pronounced saved (Acts 2:36, 38; 1 John 4:15; Mark 16:16). A sinner is active in obeying these commandments; when they are done, he is passive as the Lord adds him to the church (Acts 2:47).

The church does not save; it is the saved. Only the Savior saves, and the saved ones make up the church. From the birthday of the church until now, day by day as sinners are being saved they are being added to the church.

J. D. Tant was asked if only members of the church would be saved. His reply was, “Not half of them.” In truth, there are two salvations: one from past sins, and one into heaven (1 Peter 1:9; 2 Peter 1:9). When one has been saved from past sins, that salvation is forever and will never be cancelled (Hebrews 10:14). But that saved person, even though a church member, if he misbehaves he falls short of the grace of God (Hebrews 12:15), and will no more go to heaven than the backsliding Israelites could go into the promised land. To them God swore that they would not enter into their rest (Hebrews 3:18). “They were overthrown in the wilderness,” and are set forth as a warning to church members lest they fall short of going to heaven (1 Corinthians 10:5-11). “Wherefore, let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (1 Corinthians 10:12).

Its Namelessness. The New Testament church is unique in that it has no proper name. Denominations have proper names. The word “denominate” means to “name” something. But the New Testament church is nameless. Though it is called the house of the Lord, the family of God, the body of Christ, and the kingdom of Christ (Galatians 6:10; Ephesians 1:22-23; 3:15; Colossians 1:13; Hebrews 3:5-6; 1 Timothy 3:15), yet it has no proper name.

Individual members of the church do have a proper name. That name is not “disciple,” though they are disciples (Acts 9:1). That name is not “brethren,” though they are brethren (Acts 9:30). That name is not “saints,” though church members are saints (Acts 9:32). Their proper and divinely given name is “Christian” (Acts 11:26), but to call the church the “Christian Church” is to give it a proper name, not known in the Bible.

To speak of the New Testament church as the “church of Christ” is right, as it is to speak of it as the “church of God” (Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 1:2), but neither is a proper name. To speak of “Church of Christ” congregations and of “Church of Christ preachers” is to denominationalize the church which is unique in that it is not a denomination (a named society).

Its Destiny. The last of five features of that divine organization that is like none other is its eternal destiny. No institution except the Lord’s church can survive the physical death of its members. But the divinely built church is so constituted that its membership is enjoyed in this life and even more abundantly in eternity. Godliness is profitable for all things, having the promise of the life which now is, and of that which is to come (1 Timothy 4:8). Faithful church members, adding the Christian graces, will “never fall. In this way the entrance to the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, will be richly provided” (2 Peter 1:5-11). “Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen” (Ephesians 3:21).—5535 E. Evergreen, #7505, Vancouver, WA 98661

***Nobody ever outgrows scripture;
the book widens and deepens with our years.***

—C.H. Spurgeon

OF SHUTTLES AND CHRIST

Charles R. Rose

Our nation was once again brought to tears by the loss of the space shuttle Columbia some weeks ago. Let us never cease praying for those families who lost so much with their loved ones in that mishap.

When the news first aired of the disaster, I recalled the first flight of that fantastic machine. My family had just moved to Mexico, Missouri a few miles from the city of Columbia for which the shuttle was named. The talk of the area was more of the firebrick on the launching pad at Cape Canaveral being manufactured at A Refractory located at Mexico and Columbia than anything else. On April 14, 1981 when astronauts John Young and Robert Crippen sat that huge space ship "Columbia" down in the California desert history was made and there was a pride in people's voices because they felt a part of something great.

As we consider the first and last flight of Columbia I think also of the first and last scenes of God's only begotten Son as recorded in Scripture.

The first advent of Jesus in the city of Bethlehem changed the face of world history more than a thousand space ventures such as we have witnessed from all the nations involved in space travel. Jesus brought a hope of eternal proportions which no scientist nor program of man could even imagine. As Jeremiah said, "O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jeremiah 10:23). Only the Son of God has the power to save humankind from complete annihilation in a fire more horrible than man has ever known.

During the lifetime of the space shuttle Columbia, great strides were made by man in science and research. Today three men are living in a space lab far off in outer space carrying on experiments which, in time, will be of great benefit to mankind. But Jesus, during his lifetime, carried mankind from the hopelessly lost state brought about by Adam's sin to a state of being "sons and daughters" to the most high God (2 Corinthians 6:17-18). Rather than being separated from the rest of humanity by miles and miles of space, Jesus asks us only to separate ourselves from the defilements of sin by obeying His gospel plan of salvation. He then asks us to continue living amongst men and teach them how to become a child of God through **faith** (John 8:24; Hebrews 11:6), **repentance** (Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30),

confession of faith (Matthew 10:32; Romans 10:9-10), and **baptism** (Mark 16:16; Acts 22:16). This obedience makes us a part of something great. It makes us a part of His church for which He died (Acts 20:28). A living stone (1 Peter 2:5), "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone" (Ephesians 2:20).

As a nation we can all be proud of the progress made through the research and development brought about through our space program. We can raise our patriotic voices together in it. As Christians we have even more reason to be proud of being a part of Christ's body (Ephesians 1:22-23; Colossians 1:18). Let us preach it with pride (Mark 16:15).

We have all seen the horrible pictures of Columbia's breakup. We have agonized with the families of the lost astronauts. This last flight of Columbia should remind us that our Lord will one-day "re-enter" the atmosphere of earth. This will also involve fire as "the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thessalonians 1:7-8). At that time all the physical world will melt with fervent heat. Each and every one of us will then face the great judge (Romans 14:10; 2 Corinthians 5:10).

The venerable Tillit S. Teddlie pictured that final scene in these words:

Someday you'll stand at the bar on high, Someday your record you'll see; Someday you'll answer the question of life, What will your answer be? What will it be? What will it be? Where will you spend your eternity? What will it be? O, what will it be? What will your answer be?—PO Box 233, Lincoln, MO 65338

THINK ABOUT IT

*Some of us are like wheelbarrows—
only useful when pushed, and very easily upset.*

*Human nature seems to endow people with the
ability to size up everyone but themselves.*

THEOLOGY VERSUS THE GOSPEL

Continued from page 13

obedience. But the devil introduced doubt into the mind of Eve. She began to doubt the goodness of God; she speculated as to how the eating of the fruit could possibly cause her death. She finally decided that she would be “the mistress of her own destiny;” she assumed for herself the control of her life. But God had reserved this control as His dominion. The more she speculated over God’s command, the more she became convinced that she ought to follow her own reasoning. Human reasoning was the cause of the downfall in Eden. This is truly the origin of “theology” into the world. Theology has from the very beginning been in the final analysis only an attempt on the part of man to reason himself out of doing what God commanded. The result of theology has been always to lead man away from obedience. The world has never had a speculative theologian in all its history who had much respect for the authority of God. It has never had one who believed, obeyed, and practiced the simple gospel of Christ.

Corinth was located in the midst of the most speculative nation in history. Human learning and human philosophy were at their height. Yet Paul tells the Corinthians that men “by their wisdom” knew not God. The spirit of philosophy and speculation found entrance into the Corinthian church, calling for some of Paul’s most scathing denunciation of the speculative spirit.

The gospel of Christ cannot be proved by resorting to the theologies of men. It rests solely upon the authority of Christ. Human speculations can find no merit in the crucifixion, in baptism, in the Lord’s Supper. The Christian does not speculate about these matters; he accepts them by faith, obeys the commandments, and trusts implicitly in the promises of God.

The best and greatest act of the human mind is for man to satisfy himself by all the evidence that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. That being settled, the noblest walk of life is to walk by faith in Christ. The greatest work of any gospel preaching is to tell men what to do to be saved, and persuade them to accept the authority of Christ. Paul sums up the whole Christian attitude thusly: “I have been

crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me; and that life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).—*Ancient Landmarks*, July 1948.

JESUS CHRIST: LIBERAL OR CONSERVATIVE?

Dalton Key

Was Christ a Liberal or a Conservative? Though these labels were not used during the days of his flesh, if they had been, he could have been considered both. Or neither.

The Pharisees would no doubt have branded Jesus a rank Liberal, for he refused to bend to their traditions and self-serving interpretations of Scripture. Though never deviating from the Father’s expressed will, Jesus was not content to continue the onerous “status quo” set by these self-appointed religious leaders. He refused to pay homage to their man-made, inconsistent legalisms, accusing the Pharisees of approaching God with the mouth and with the lips while keeping their heart far from the Father (Matthew 15:8).

On the other hand, the Sadducees would have surely singled Jesus out as a narrow-minded Conservative, for he held to a strict, legalistic view of such biblical matters as the spirit and the resurrection from the dead. When confronted with a hypothetical scenario concerning one wife, seven brothers, the resurrection and “whose wife shall she be?” the Lord insisted strict attention be paid to the absolute truth of God’s Word: “You do err,” he said, “not knowing the Scriptures” (Matthew 22:29).

We can be thankful that what mattered most to Jesus was not what others thought of Him, but what the Father thought. He sought to be seen in the eyes of his Father, not as a liberal, not as conservative, but as faithful-faithful in form, faithful in substance; faithful in practice, faithful in spirit.

And above all else and before all else, Christ was faithful (Hebrews 3:2).

As well we all should be.—801 NE 15th, Amarillo, TX 79107