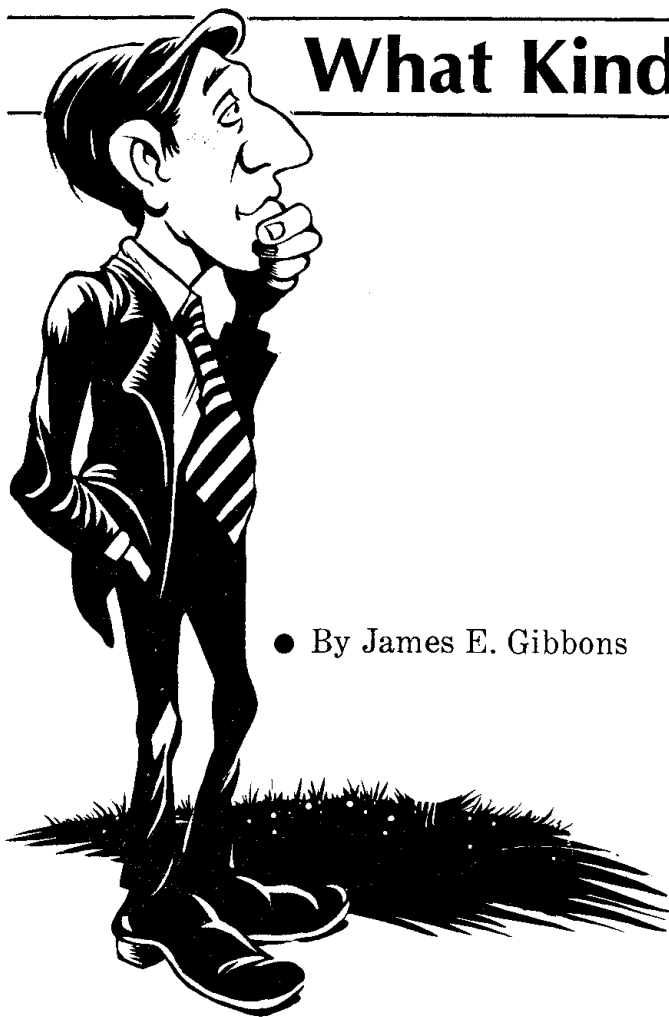


The Sword AND Staff

"Preach the Word." (II Timothy 4:2)

•

"Feed the Flock." (I Peter 5:2)



• By James E. Gibbons

What Kind of Fool Are You?

fools by the unerring word of God. God knows what He is talking about when he labels someone this. There are different kinds of fools mentioned in the Scriptures. Most of them are bad men, but I hope that you and I can be called a fool in one sense that we read in the Bible.

Back to our original question: "What kind of fool are you?"

I. THE RICH FOOL.

Notice the parable of Jesus in Luke 12:16-21. "The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow MY fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down MY barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all MY fruits and MY goods. And I will say to MY soul, Soul, THOU hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, THOU FOOL, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

This man was a fool—God labels him as such! What made him a fool? It was not the riches directly; within themselves they are not wrong. It was this man's selfish, self-centeredness and false security in his material things that brought the pronouncement of God upon him. He seemed to think exclusively in terms of what "I will do" and "MY goods." God was left out of the picture. Jesus concluded this parable by saying, "So is he that layeth up treasure

A reprint from the past—This article appeared in **THE SWORD AND STAFF** twenty-five years ago

"WHAT KIND of fool are you?"

To some this may appear as a rather rude and crude question to be asking. The dictionary gives various definitions of this word FOOL, all the way from a simpleton to one made to appear foolish. Indeed it is a serious charge to call someone a fool. In a fit of rage one should never be guilty of name calling, especially calling another a fool. Jesus said, "...whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire" (Matthew 5:22). However, when we read our Bibles we find that certain men have been called

for himself and is not rich toward God." Every person who thinks only in terms of himself and indulging in worldly pleasure is a fool according to our Lord.

The apostle Paul gives many wholesome admonitions concerning material things and the dangers involved in such. To Timothy he said, "...the love of money is the root of all evil" (I Timothy 6:10a). Also, "But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many

(Continued on Page 5)

THE SWORD AND STAFF

Post Office Box 147

Mount Airy, N. C. 27030 U. S. A.

INFORMATION:

• We are totally dependent upon your financial backing in the publication of this religious paper. To get on the mailing list, send a contribution. Subsidizing gifts along are definitely needed in order for us to continue this ministry of love. You may use the date of entry affixed beside your name and address as a reminder and point of reference in sending an offering (perhaps annually). Make your checks out to **CHURCH IN MOUNT AIRY**. Frequency of publication is determined by your financial backing. James E. Gibbons is editor. (Money received for printed materials is considered as an offering).

Proverbially SPEAKING...

TOO MANY "pastors" today rather have a big herd of goats to tend than a small flock of sheep.

"Every job is a self-portrait of the person who did it—autograph your work with excellence!"

There is no man who has so much to learn as the man who thinks he knows it all (evidently he hasn't been exposed to much information yet).

"Treat your wife like a thoroughbred and she won't become a nag."

They who preach so much about God's love and grace (how great it is!), and at the same time never mention the awfulness of sin (and its consequence), have really missed the point of what the love and grace is all about.

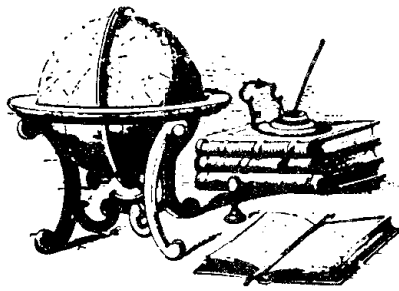
"He whose heart is harden as stone 'hears no more than rocks, when winds and waters roar'."

Christian parents who have a hard time saying "no" to their children will have children who have a hard time saying "no" to the world.

"Problem people are people with problems."

Only those who have question marks about their manhood must prove that they are a man.

"God had a purpose in mind when He made the mouth (just one) to close and two ears to always remain open."



EDITORIAL

COMMENTS...

AN "UPDATE" LETTER ON OUR SITUATION

DEAR READER AND FRIEND:

About two years ago we let you in on some personal matters involving this paper. The name *THE SWORD AND STAFF* does not refer to a publishing company but to the Word of God. This publication is largely the effort of one man (the editor) and is printed on a small off-set press in the basement of his house. We apologized for telling you of the financial straits we were in (around \$1200 is involved in getting out just one issue of this paper—basic cost) because of the increasing expense in such an endeavor. Again we are hesitate to tell you about our present situation, but perhaps an update is in order.

Originally we were getting out an 8-page paper once a month. Because of spiraling costs we eventually went bimonthly and then to conserve, inasmuch as postal rates were getting so high, we increased the number of pages to 16 (and got the paper out as we were financially able). This year (1983) four 16-page issues have gone into the mail.

Our policy has been to get all back bills paid before another issue went into the mail. However, this past issue saw us borrowing about \$1000 to get that particular one printed and mailed. Although some have been generous, others have not responded, and we are continually plagued with problems. Publishing *THE SWORD AND STAFF* is no commercial endeavor. It is purely and simply a ministry of love by the editor for the Lord and His Truth. All is unselfishly done toward that end.

Although this past year has been an especially hard one, our resolve is to continue publishing *THE SWORD AND STAFF*. It seems the Lord has used this editor (with his limited abilities) best in this way. To simplify matters we are dropping the expression "subscription" used in reference to receiving this paper. We are dependent upon your offering or contribution. We wish to update our mailing list, deleting all who do not wish to receive this paper.

In such wicked and apostate times as these it is our conviction that *THE SWORD AND STAFF* (as never before) needs to stay in the mail. When times are trying it is no time to stop trying. Will you back us with an offering at least once a year? We are experiencing some of our greatest hardships ever encountered since we started publishing. Please pray for us.

JAMES E. GIBBONS

CUTTING THE GORDIAN KNOT OF SIN

ACCORDING TO ANCIENT LEGEND, Gordius was a poor peasant who became king of Phrygia in Asia Minor. In response to the prophecy of an oracle, as the first man coming into the city in a wagon and approaching the public square and the temple of Zeus, he had been declared king. In gratitude, Gordius dedicated his wagon to the

god Zeus. It was placed in the grove of the temple, and the pole of the wagon was tied to the yoke with a very intricate knot that defied untying. No one could untie it. With the passing of time, the saying developed that whoever was successful in untying the knot would be ruler of all of Asia. The story goes that in 333 B.C. Alexander the Great came through in his conquest of the world. Faced with the disturbing difficulty of being unable to untie the Gordian knot, he took his sword and with one decisive stroke cut through it. This is the origin of the expression "to cut the Gordian knot," and it is used to describe a situation where a perplexing (and seemingly unsurmountable) problem is solved by a quick and decisive action.

Man is created in the very image of God, but man is a fallen creature. The presence of sin and the consequent depravity that follows in its footsteps presents a problem that seemingly defies solution. In its scope it is even as the apostle Paul wrote: "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). "For we know the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now" (Romans 8:22). "For the wages of sin is death..." (Romans 6:23). Mankind certainly has made a first-class mess of it. All of the problems of the world are traced back to sin. It is the cause of all heartache, all sorrow (directly or indirectly). O what personal, what complicated, problems can come into an individual's life as the result of sin! So many are victims caught in the web of their own doings. They are on collision course with judgment as they speed full-throttle on down the dead-end, one-way street of life. Many in despair are at the end of their rope now. The wages of sin say "you have had it." You are under condemnation. The sentence is as good as passed. Death and hell await.

But the very Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, has cut the Gordian knot of sin. An utterly desparate and "impossible" situation (to man) calls for a grand and decisive action on the part of Almighty God to absolve the problem once and for all. Man is helplessly and hopelessly lost. BUT, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Jesus through the virgin birth, taking the very form of man (IMMANUEL), completely identified himself with the human race from the fetus to the grave. Although he committed no sin, he tasted the wages of sin like and for all of mankind. He has nipped death in its bud, sin. "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (II Corinthians 5:21). We were on death row, waiting execution. God has cut through all the legal entanglements of the law and said: "YOU ARE FORGIVEN; GO AND SIN NO MORE!" And, listen: "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:25). Paul says HE has "delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son" (Colossians 1:13). We have the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38), and are now in the kingdom of His love and grace. We are a new creation in Christ Jesus. A new start in life is ours, and we are offered strength and help in the time of need. The Gordian knot of sin has been severed. □

WARNING LABEL FOR MARIJUANA?

SEN. PAULA HAWKINS of Florida proposed recently before the U. S. Senate that the following warning be imprinted on every marijuana cigarette: (Continued on Next Page)

WHICH CHURCH SHOULD I JOIN?

*All up and down this troubled land confusion reigns today,
As honest folks on every hand in doubt are heard to say:
"I cannot tell which church to join, there are so very many."
To whom we offer this advice: you should never join any.*

*You cannot join the church of Christ, no man can vote you in;
The Lord Himself will add you when He saves you from your sin.
Then take no chances, neighbor; this race but once you will run.
A church you would "join" must be of man, and not the proper one.*

*Beware a church you cannot find within the sacred pages.
Be safe, dear sinner, rest your soul upon the Rock of Ages.
Be added to His blood-bought church, and drink salvation's cup;
For every plant that not of God, it shall Be rooted up.*

*No mourner's bench on Pentecost the apostle Peter fitted.
He said, "Repent and be baptized, that your sins may be remitted."
The Lord who saved and added those who actually did His will,
Will do the same for you, dear friend, for He is adding still.*

*Let no false teachers lead you wrong, nor close your eyes in slumber;
When Jesus said He would build His church—'twas not in plural number!
No choice of churches, neighbor mine, is found beneath the sun;
Though men may have ten thousand, OUR SAVIOUR HAS BUT ONE!*

—SELECTED

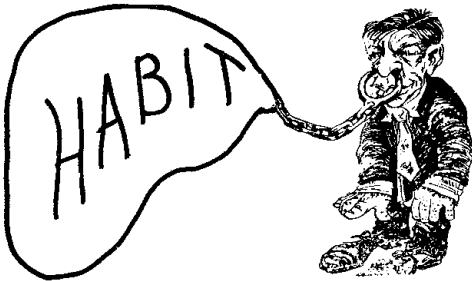
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WE HEREBY state and reaffirm our declaration of independence of (and disassociation from) all human religious doctrines and traditions (we mean all) and from all man-made religious organizations, recognizing only the local church as God's plan for the corporate function of the church.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★



On The Lookout For A Sinister Enemy



EDITORIAL COMMENTS...

(Continued from Page 3)

“Warning. The Surgeon General has determined that marijuana smoking impairs memory, learning performance, and speech. Reduces your ability to perform simple motor tasks, speeds up your heart rate, permeates your lungs with cancer-causing hydrocarbons, interferes with the menstrual cycle, affects the reproductive cycle, leads to psychological problems, induces feelings of paranoia, and can inspire panic anxiety reactions leading to suicide, and experts have testified it takes 35 days to eliminate the effect of one joint from your body.”

No doubt this was proposed “somewhat tongue in cheek” since marijuana (pot) is an illegal drug. But (in all sincerity) its wide use, illegal or not, prompts such information to be more commonly known. Recently an article in the **NEW YORK TIMES** estimated that 30 million Americans smoke pot (this was based on a survey). State officials in North Carolina have estimated that the marijuana harvest by illicit farmers is worth up to \$1.6 billion dollars a year. If that is true, this illegal drug exceeds what North Carolina farmers get from a legal one, tobacco. The tobacco crop brought \$1.2 billion in 1982.

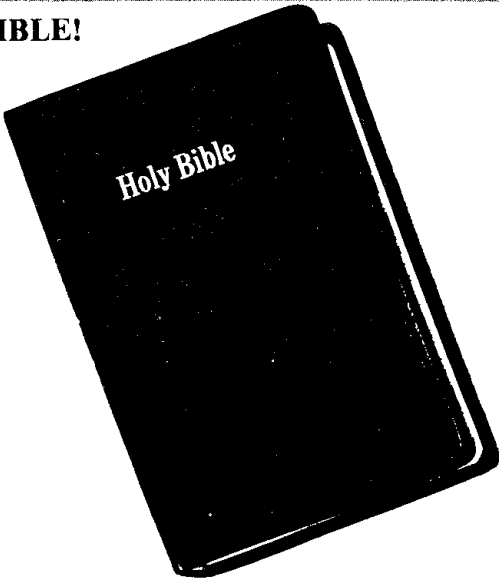
Smoking pot is not the innocent, harmless “recreational” activity that many thoughtless people think it is. Along with alcohol and tobacco, it is doing its part to make our nation physically and mentally degenerate. Inferiority in human lives and productivity can only result from it.

The wise will not start such senseless practices, and the thinking will “wise up” and make a break with them before they are broken.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

READING THE BIBLE!

It is one thing to “read the Bible through;”
Another thing to read to learn and do!
Some read it as their “duty” — once a week,
But no instruction from the Bible seek.
One reads to “bring himself into repute”
By showing others how he “can dispute!”
While others read “because their neighbors do;”
To see how long ‘twill take to “read it through.”
Some read it for the wonders that are there —
How David killed a lion, and a bear.
While others read with uncommon care —
Hoping to find “some contradiction” there!
One reads “with fathers specks upon his head,”
And “sees” the things just as his father said!
Some read to “prove” a pre-adopted creed,
Hence understand but little what they read;
For every passage in the Book they bend
To make it suit that “all important” end!
So many people in these latter days
Have read the Bible in so many ways



That few can tell which “system” is the best;
For every party contradicts the rest!
But read it prayerfully, and you will see
Although men contradict, God’s word agrees!
For what the early Bible prophets wrote
We find that Christ and His apostles quote.
So trust no greed that trembles to recall
What has been penned by one and verified by all!
Author Unknown



What Kind of Fool Are You?

(Continued from Page 1)

foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition" (6:9). Timothy was to "charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy" (6:17). Again, he says, "For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor COVETOUS man, who is an IDOLATER, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God" (Ephesians 5:5). Money is not the root of all evil, but the LOVE of it is said to be. It is just according to how we use our material possessions.

A lot of people are foolish today, just like the rich fool. We don't have to be rich to be guilty of the same sin of this man. The wrong attitude and use of the meager things we have will bring the same pronouncement from God upon us. If we are so selfish, covetous and stingy that we cannot even tithe of our income into God's work, we surely fit into the same category. Half "converted", lukewarm Christians, feeling secure in their material gain, sit back in their seats of do-nothing while the kingdom of God is poverty stricken, both spiritually and materially, will hear God say sooner or later, "THOU FOOL!"

II. THE PROUD FOOL.

The book of Proverbs points out the folly and foolishness of the fool. Among the fools listed is the proud fool. (Proverbs 14:16). In the New Testament, Acts 12:20-23, Herod truly is the proud fool. Notice: "And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them (of Tyre and Sidon). And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man. And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost."

Why is Herod to be regarded as a fool? He took something unto himself that did not belong to him. God expects man to be humble. Certainly we are created after God's own image but also we are composed merely of the elements of the dust of the earth. We are sinful—all have fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). We come before God empty-handed, barren, having nothing to glory of and depending on Him for mercy. As we read the Bible we find it proclaims the glory of God from cover to cover. In fact that seems to be one of the purposes of God, His glory. The heavens, the universe, show the glory of God (Psalms 19:1). God is glorified today through the church (Ephesians 3:21). God is glorified in His Son and the Holy Spirit seeks to bring this glory about (John 16:14). We glorify our Father in heaven, as members of the church, by letting our lights so shine before men (Matthew 5:16; I Corinthians 6:20).

Thus, Herod was very foolish, taking something upon himself that was not his to take. He came in conflict with the plan of God, therefore, he was foolish. He didn't try to correct the people in their flattery, but received it as if he were God.

There are many foolish proud people today. Worldly pride is one of the outstanding sins of our time. A lot of times the proud fool and the rich fool (or one trying to impress others as such) are found in the same person. The way people dress in this modern era, and decorate themselves, shows their worldly pride. The proud heart is seen in the sinner who will not wilt his pride to walk down the aisle of the church building and accept Christ. Some people walk down the street with their nose in the air and if it came a rain storm suddenly, it would probably drown them. Ministers take glory unto themselves in more ways than one, which is not due them above other Christians. Like Herod permitting the people to call him "a god" preachers today appendage their name with "Reverend," "Most Holy Father," etc. (Cf. Psalms 111:9; Matthew 23). God looks down upon us frail human beings and surely thinks how foolish we are. One can never become nor remain a Christian who is a proud fool.

III. THE UNBELIEVING FOOL.

"The FOOL hath said in his heart, There is no God. They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good" (Psalms 14:1).

It is no surprise that the Bible labels the unbeliever as a fool. The purpose of the Bible is to produce faith (Romans 10:17). When the evidence is overwhelmingly in favor of God and His revealed truths, to reject it is to be foolish. Even human reasoning demands that there is a Higher Power behind everything. There must be an Uncaused Cause behind every cause. The Word of God has been preserved for centuries, each inspired writer adding his part to the library of volumes. The Bible itself is a miracle and the fact that we have it declares that God is. Many, many prophecies have been fulfilled to the letter. It is a historical fact that Christ lived, our calendar being based on his appearance in history. We see men who were unbelievers and doubters give their lives freely unto death for Christianity. The Bible is the perfect code of morality. In the light of this to deny God and the inspiration of the Scriptures is to be exceedingly foolish.

But we are living in an age of unbelief, and religious men are denying the historical doctrines of Christianity. Infidelity is parading itself in the colleges and universities of this land in the name of scholarship. Every denomination seems to be divided over the liberal and conservative approach to religion. Someone has said, "A liberal modernism is seeking to tell the people that a God without wrath brought man without sin into a kingdom without judgment through a Christ without a cross!" The Bible is looked upon as man's seeking after God, and not necessarily God's revelation to man of Himself. Sociology has taken the place of theology. The spirit of the age has so influenced man that it is hard to find people with a definite set of convictions in reference to orthodox Christianity. Be-

(Continued on Next Page)

WHAT KIND OF FOOL ARE YOU?

(Continued from Last Page)

lieve as you like we are told, or rather, don't believe anything.

You say, "I'm not an unbelieving fool." But what do you believe? Are you deeply grounded in the faith? You say, "Yes." But what about your works? Paul tells of some who professed that they knew God, but by their works they denied him (Titus 1:16). I am afraid that hits a lot of us. Then there are those who believe and accept just certain portions of the Bible, that which fits their little denominational mold. God say that you are foolish!

IV. THE FOOL WITH UNCONTROLLED TONGUE.

Back to Proverbs again we read, 'He that hideth hatred with lying lips, and he that uttereth a slander, is a FOOL' (Proverbs 10:18). The kind of fool under consideration now is the fool with an uncontrolled tongue.

Why is such a person to be thought of as a fool in the light of the Scriptures? For one thing he is self-deceived about his religion. James said, 'If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridlETH not his tongue, but deceivETH his own heart, this man's religion is vain' (James 1:26). With vain religion no man is going to heaven. Also, "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" If our tongues are not controlled that means our lives are not controlled. Gossip shows the shallow and thoughtless life of an individual. Profanity opens wide the door to see a black heart. Lying reveals a deceitful and unbelieving heart. Truly by a man's words he will be justified or condemned.

Reader, what about your tongue? Is it a deadly monster within you, or a blessing for others? Does the Bible designation of fool hit you here? Paul spoke of some women who could not or would not control their tongues, going from house to house (I Timothy 5:12,13). I am afraid that the 'Ladies' Aid' that a lot of traditional churches have is just a playhouse organization whereby the ladies get together to gossip. They aid—SATAN!

V. FOOLS FOR CHRIST.

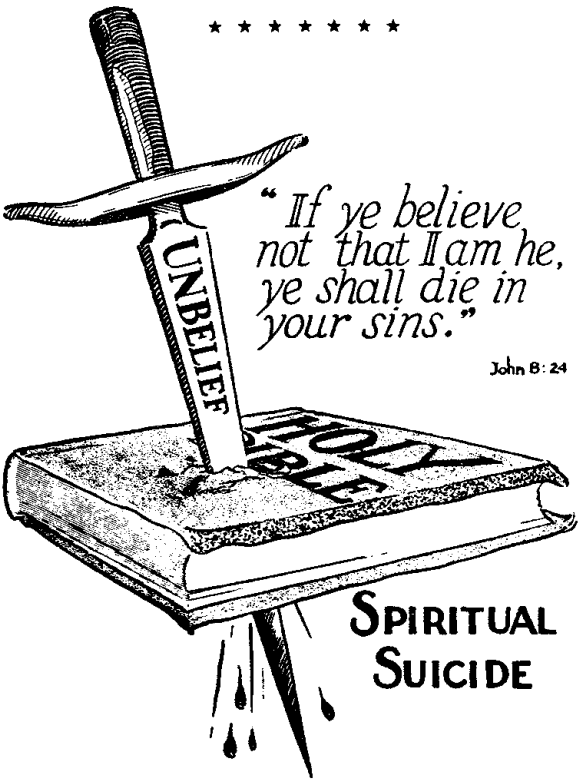
But, O my friend, are you a fool? You say, "No, I don't think that I am any of these that we have examined!" I hope you are not either, but let us think about one kind of fool now that I hope I am and would like to be, and I know that you would too. In reference to the gospel preachers in the apostolic church, Paul said, "For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men, We are FOOLS for Christ's sake" (I Corinthians 4:9, 10a; also 3:18).

The people about Paul could look upon him and his co-workers from the perspective of the world and say, "What fools are these men!" We can easily see why men of the world would call our dear brother Paul a fool. Think of all that he left for Christ. He was a promising young man of prestige and probably wealth, among the Jews. He had the most desirable family background. But he left it all to become a social outcast from his society, to work with his own hands, and to suffer to the point of death. His message

was looked upon by the world as foolishness, a man dying on a humiliating cross—God expressing himself to the world in such a manner—how foolish! Paul! Once a man cried out, "Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad!" But Paul counted it a joy to suffer for and like his Christ.

If we take a stand for Jesus today like we should, people will be quick to call us fanatical, narrow, and even fools. As Peter said, "Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you" (I Peter 4:4). Our faith is not in this world. Our lives are governed by an allegiance to the kingdom of heaven. We are citizens of another world, yet unseen, and deny ourselves many things in this life for the sake of the life to come. A Christian is different in the eyes of God and the world. When he isn't there is some doubt about his Christianity.

ARE YOU A FOOL FOR CHRIST? Have you taken the stand that God demands of you? We are living in a civilization where modern science has made it possible to produce by mass production. It seems that human beings have accustomed themselves to thinking in the same pattern. Everyone is to talk alike, look alike, etc., and if they don't, they are looked upon as strange. But to be a Christian there are many things in the group pattern that we must rebel against, and to do so is to bring the disfavor of the multitude upon us, inviting them to call us foolish. In some extreme cases it may even bring outright persecution. But I think of Jesus and all that he has done for us, setting us an example. The words of a challenging song ring in my ears: "Are you able said the Master to be crucified with with me; yea, the sturdy dreamer (Christian) answered to the death we follow thee." What about it? Are you a fool for Christ? I had rather be a fool for Christ, and expect heaven as my home, than to be a fool in the many other ways that we have noticed, and have no hope of heaven! □



The Bible

Approximately forty men wrote in giving us the Bible. This was over a period of fifteen hundred (1500) years; yet when compiled, their writings make a harmonious book. A marvel indeed!

The Bible is the inspired word. It was written by inspiration of God. This has never been successfully refuted and never will be.

The fruit produced by the Bible is always good. It makes men what they ought to be. It always makes better men of those who follow it. We never go wrong by strictly walking as it directs. The Bible is our guide through life. The Gospel is God's Power to save our souls.

Atheists, skeptics and others have tried in vain to destroy the Bible. It continues to stand. It shall stand!

Find the truth for your life by carefully studying the Bible. The truth will make you free.

—Truth

Others Will Know It!

IF YOU ARE A true Christian, others will know it. "Your good works, which they behold" may well cause others to "glorify God in the day of visitation" (I Peter 2:12). To be a true Christian, one must be a Christian every day of the week. You can not be a true Christian just on Sunday.

The men or women you work with will know it—if you are a true Christian. They know how you speak each day and under varying circumstances. They know how well you control your emotions—how easily you become angry—and whether you sin if you do.

Your children and your wife will know it—if you are a true Christian. Your home has a different atmosphere from others if you are a real Christian.

Young friends, your classmates will know it—if you are a faithful Christian. They know of your honesty. You reveal a great deal about yourself by the attitudes you manifest in class—secular or Bible class. You say a great deal by the attitude you take toward your teacher and other students.

If you are a real Christian the people you do business with will know it. Your honesty will show. Your boss will know—if you are a true Christian. He recognizes your dependability, your industry.

The lost will know it—if you are a true Christian. You will evidence this fact by your effort to save their souls.

The sick and bereaved will know it—if you are a real Christian. The needy will know it, too. These will tell others of the reality of your faith. They will let others know what they think of you. You can be a great influence for good.

Certainly, your brethren will know it—if you are a genuine Christian. They will know your cooperative spirit, your spirituality, your humility, your sincerity, your unselfishness, your patience, your understanding and your love. You can not hide the fact if you are a Christian through and through.

Yes, if you are a Christian, OTHERS WILL KNOW IT!

—Ernest A. Finley

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

TWO WISE GOATS

MARTIN LUTHER is credited with the following interesting story:

Two mountain goats meet each other on a narrow ledge just wide enough for one of the animals. On the left there is a sheer cliff, and on the right a deep lake. The two face each other. What should they do? They cannot back up... that would be too dangerous. They cannot turn around because the ledge is too narrow.

Now, if the goats had no more sense than some people, they would meet head on and start butting each other till they fell into the lake below. Luther tells us that goats have better sense than this. One lies down on the trail and lets the other literally walk over him...both are safe. They must be willing (at least one of them) humbly to lie down and let the other pass over him. If they were like some people, they would argue about WHO should lie down, and WHO should walk over. But evidently "goat sense" is common sense!

Is there any need to make an application to ourselves? How often our stubbornness results in tragedy. How hard to be the least, to humble ourselves for the best interests of others. We hear folks say, "I'm going to stand up for my rights!" How much better it would be to meekly "suffer wrong" and be the least. 'Tis hard to learn such a lesson as this. Another says, "It is the principle of the thing I'm fighting for. It's not the few pennies involved, or the results I've born...but I must defend my principles!" Remember, the PRINCIPLE thing is LOVE, and the Bible says "LOVE...is kind...seeketh not its own" (I Cor. 13:4,5). Better allow yourself to be walked over than to quarrel.

*Here lies the body of Jonathan Gray,
Who died maintaining his right of way.
He was right, dead right, as he sped along,
But he's just as dead as if he's been wrong.*

"LET ALL YOUR THINGS be done with love" (I Cor. 16:14).—Lexington Lamplighter □

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JOSEPHUS FORGOT TO MENTION JESUS

FLAVIOUS JOSEPHUS, the Jewish historian, probably did not mention Jesus of Nazareth at all in his voluminous records of the Jewish nation. There is a passage in which he is supposed to have called Him "Christ" but the passage is of very doubtful origin (Ant. XVIII:iii,3). And, of course, critics of Jesus have said that if He was overlooked by Josephus He must not have been very important.

A comment from Alfred Edersheim in his book *The Temple* is helpful on this point: "Such was the Temple as restored by Herod—a work which occupied forty-six years to its completion. Yet, though the Rabbis never weary praising its splendor, not with one word do any of those who were contemporary indicate that its restoration was carried out by Herod the Great. So memorable an event in their history is passed over with the most absolute silence. What a complete answer does this afford to the objection sometimes raised from the silence of Josephus about the person and mission of Jesus!" (p. 59)—D. Bassett □

The Chain Of Sin

SOLOMON KNEW what he was talking about when he wrote, "His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sins" (Proverbs 5:22)! Sin forms a chain around the lives of men and women, binding them and guaranteeing their continued servitude to Satan. The links in that chain might bear these titles:

CHARACTER EROSION. Look back where you used to be. Sin has so eaten at your convictions that you no longer have the character to be able to say "NO" to sin and make it stick.

OBSCURED VALUES. What are life's most precious values? A family, freedom, hope of life eternal? When sin takes over, it is hard to see these goals. Sin tarnishes values.

DEPRIVATION. The longer you serve sin the more good you miss in life. Finally you've missed so much so long that the wages of sin seem adequate because you forget there is anything better.

HALF-CURES. Half-cures of the aches of sin give you temporary relief, but you are still sin-sick. Dr. Devil keeps you coming back by implying that an occasional shot of religion will cure you.

HABIT. This is perhaps the strongest link, yet the least intelligent. When men have no reason for sinning, when the pleasure is gone, when conscience bums, habit keeps you in sin anyway.

BUT SIN'S CHAIN CAN BE BROKEN! One man who cried out in pain over the oppressive chains of sin found victory in Christ. "O wretched man that I am who shall deliver me?...I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord" who has set me free! (Romans 7:24,25). The same rejoicing and freedom can be yours by believing and repenting of sin. Baptism will then remove that sin, forever removing the shackles (Acts 2:38; 22:16; Romans chapter 6).

—Author Unknown

THE DEVIL'S BEATITUDES

BLESSED are they who are too tired and busy to go to church on Sunday; for they are my best workers.

Blessed are they who are bored with the minister's mannerisms and mistakes; for they get nothing out of the sermon.

Blessed is the church member who expects to be invited to his own church; for he is an important member to me.

Blessed are they who do not get to church on Sunday evening for they cause the world to say, "The church is failing."

Blessed are they who gossip, for they cause strife and divisions which pleases me very much.

Blessed are they who are easily offended, for they will get angry and quit.

Blessed are they who do not give liberally of their means to carry on God's work and missions; they are my helpers.

Blessed is he who professes to love God but hates his brother for he shall be with me forever. —Selected □

RECIPE FOR CONTENTMENT

Health enough to make work a pleasure.
Wealth enough to support your needs.
Strength enough to battle with difficulties and forsake them.
Grace enough to confess your sins and overcome them.
Patience enough to toil until some good is accomplished.
Charity enough to see some good in your neighbor.
Love enough to move you to be useful and helpful to others.
Faith enough to make real the things of God.
And hope enough to remove all anxious fears concerning the future. —Selected □

"OVERTIME"

15 minutes overtime—Heaven forbid!
Too much sermon, too much song;
Hold on...
Something's gone wrong.

For Paul preached till mid-night,
And Peter for hours on end;
Folks hungered and thirsted
For righteousness...back then.

O, but we must watch the clock;
Count the seconds—
Tic-toc, tic-toc.
Church mustn't last too long;
It must not! Tic-toc, tic-toc.

On the bleachers we'll sit for hours,
Enjoying a basketball game;
No complaints, the pleasure's ours.
For Jesus can't we do the same?

The game must go on...
Overtime—15 minutes more.
Faithful fans for victory roar,
Filled with team spirit—emotions soar.

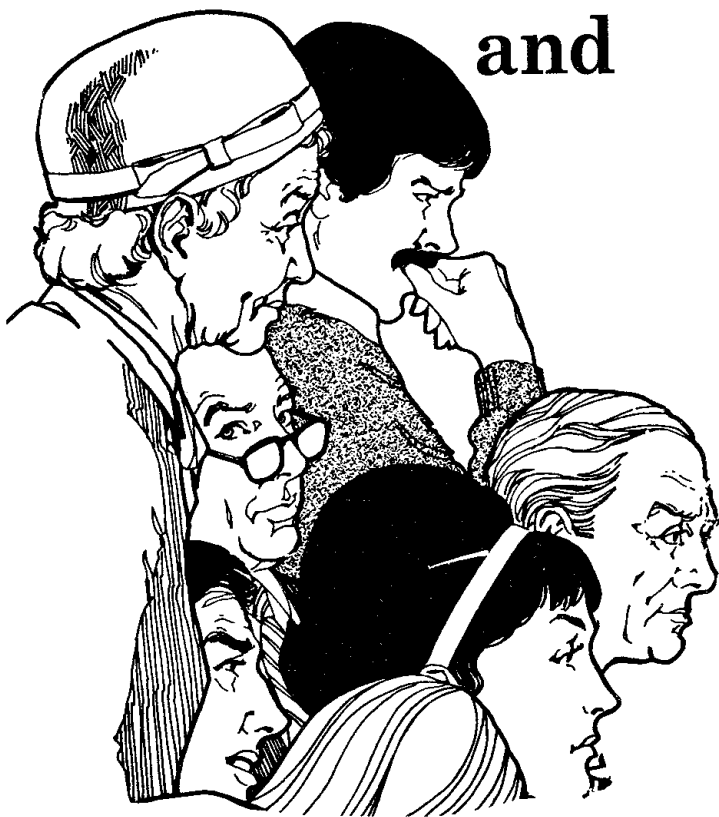
Eternity, Forever, that'll be awhile;
How can those who bewail each moment
Endure Heaven—
Won't it cramp their style?

"...Keep it short;
We've got things to do."
Listen, I'll not skimp on the Lord's time;
Dare you?

"...and so shall we ever be with the Lord."
—I THESSALONIANS 4:17.

—By BOB WICKLINE
5204 U.S. 50 —Hillsboro, Ohio 45133

The CHRISTIAN and



CONSCIENCE

(By James E. Gibbons—1535 Fairfield Dr.—Mt. Airy, N. C. 27030)

● *"Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned" (I Timothy 1:5).*

AS WE CONSIDER "Christian and conscience," very likely you have no question as to what is meant by Christian (Acts 2:36-42; Galatians 3:27; 2:20; I John 2:3-6), but let us take another look at conscience. A word can best be understood by breaking it down and examining its root parts. Conscience is a combination of "con" and "science." The prefix "con" signifies with or alongside, and the main stem "science" has reference to knowing, to knowledge. The Greek word *suneidesis* represented by our English word conscience means exactly and literally the same thing. Conscience is that acquired and ingrained moral knowledge, that still small voice that speaks to us (and even prods us) about right and wrong. Thus, very appropriately the *New World Dictionary* gives this definition of conscience: "a knowledge or sense of right and wrong, with a compulsion to do right; moral judgment that opposes the violation of a previously recognized ethical principle and that leads to feelings of guilt if one violates such a principle."

Conscience is very much like the speedometer on your car—especially like some of them in the older cars that were fastened to a gauge. The gauge could be set, and a buzzer would go off when you exceeded the set speed. A Christian's conscience should be like cruise control. It

keeps you within the lawful limits (if properly set).

As a matter of interest there are several kinds of consciences mentioned in the New Testament, e. g. a good conscience (I Timothy 1:5, 19); a pure conscience (II Timothy 1:3; I Timothy 3:9); a weak conscience (I Corinthians 8:9-13); an evil conscience (Hebrews 10:22); a seared conscience (I Timothy 4:2); etc.

All men have consciences unless they are completely amoral (which is highly unlikely). Simply by living in human society and inter-reacting with other human beings some sort of conscience is formed (Romans 2:14, 15). However, it has been said that the political philosophy of communism is amoral, or rather its proponents, because they will adapt any expediency to advance their cause, right or wrong. Some other systems are about as bad.

The conscience of human society can and does become darkened and depraved (Ephesians 4:17-19; I John 1:15-17). The sub-Christian standards, or lack of standards, on television are continually brainwashing the public (making immorality, nudity, violence, profanity, drinking, dancing, etc. acceptable). The less than honest proceedings in the business world can be accepted as the normal way of doing things (even lying, cheating, and stealing at times). Drinking, smoking, drug abuse, and profanity are all about us, and if we are not careful we will think this is not so bad. It is a shame that immorality, running around, divorce, and remarriage spill over into that which is supposed to be the Lord's church.

We commonly hear, "Let your conscience be your guide." Most people believe this alone is a safe guide. But, as we have just seen, the general outlook of society (and a conscience based on that) may be darkened and even depraved. Then there is such a thing as an unenlightened conscience. A person may sincerely be in the wrong. He just doesn't know any better. The heathen in the Old Testament period would make human sacrifices of their children to the burning furnace god, Molech, with a clear conscience. Jesus said the time was coming when "they shall put you out of the synagogues: yea the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service" (John 16:1-4). Although Paul had persecuted the church, he declared, "I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day" (Acts 23:1; II Timothy 1:3). He persecuted the church, thinking he was doing God's will, but when he learned the truth he changed. The least we can do is to live up to our consciences, but there is a possibility of being uninformed or misinformed. Above all, let us make every effort to have enlightened consciences so they will be safe guides.

Therefore, knowing more about the conscience, and having the right kind of conscience is very important to the Christian. The apostle Paul said that what God was trying to accomplish with us (the end result) was love out of a pure heart—and a good conscience and faith that is the real thing (I Timothy 1:5). Yes, the conscience must be right—a Christian must have a good conscience.

I. GETTING A GOOD CONSCIENCE.

Sinful living will produce a bad conscience in more ways than one. If a person has known anything about right and wrong, he may be ridden with guilt feelings. These

(Continued on Next Page)

THE CHRISTIAN AND CONSCIENCE

(Continued from Last Page)

subconscious feelings which have permeated the depths of his soul may cause all kinds of psychological problems and spill over into his everyday life. Then by repeated sinning, one's conscience may no longer effectively work. Paul spoke of some "having their conscience seared with a hot iron" (I Timothy 4:2). This is like a branding iron whereby the nerve (and sensitivity) is killed. People may reach the point like the pagan first century Gentiles, "who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness" (Ephesians 4:19). Many today have made shipwreck of their morals and have played havoc with their consciences.

But the Word of God can convict that slumbering conscience. Jesus had said, "And when he (THE HOLY SPIRIT) is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on me; Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged" (John 16:8-11). Hebrews 4:12 says, "For the word of God is quick (alive), and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." When Peter preached on the day of Pentecost, they who heard "were pricked in their heart" (Acts 2:37). We even read about the response of hardened Felix: "And as he (Paul) reasoned of righteousness, temperance (self-control), and judgment to come, Felix trembled..." (Acts 24:25).

Thank God if there is still a spark of spiritual sensitivity whereby your conscience can be stirred. Some way or another the burdensome guilt feelings must now be gotten rid of. Better still, the conscience must be set aright which produces the feelings. All of this gets back to the problem of sin (violation of moral knowledge), which produces a guilt-ridden conscience.

Although the Law of Moses was (and is) great in convicting sin, it was (and is) powerless pertaining to the conscience (and right living). The writer of Hebrews speaks of the "gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience" (Hebrews 9:9). Furthermore: "For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins" (Hebrews 10:1,2). But Paul preached of another sacrifice to the Corinthians: "For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (I Corinthians 2:2). The love of God manifested on the old rugged cross gets through to the conscience. Thus, we read, "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (Hebrews 9:14).

A good conscience is initially obtained when one repents and is baptized for the remission of sins. On the day of Pentecost when Peter preached that great gospel

sermon, we read, "Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost (Spirit)" (Acts 2:38,39). Hebrews 10:22 reads, "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water." The apostle Peter tells us (I Peter 3:21) that baptism is "the answer (inquiry) of a good conscience toward God." Thus, the burden (and guilt) of sin is rolled away. With a clean slate, and a new start, the conscience is activated and attuned to know and do the will of God.

II. DEVELOPING A GOOD CONSCIENCE.

Having obtained a clear conscience, we wish to develop and maintain a good conscience. Good, not only in being free from feelings of guilt, but in that it is informed, works correctly, and can be relied upon. (As we have pointed out, conscience involves your moral feelings based upon your knowledge of right and wrong. If you are uninformed or misinformed your conscience very likely will not be reliable). Did you ever have a speedometer on your car which wouldn't work right? It can get you into trouble.

The apostle Paul commanded, "Wherefore be not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is" (Ephesians 5:17). "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Romans 12:2). Hebrews 5:14 speaks of those "who by reason of use have their senses exercises to discern both good and evil."

Therefore, spiritual exercise (and the renewing of our minds) is very necessary. There must be effort on our part to study and know the will of God which is embodied in the Word of God. The more we prayerfully study the Word of God, and incorporate it into our lives, the better conscience we will have. The conscience will be good in the sense that it really knows what is right, and it will be a good conscience in that it really works—it is very sensitive about right and wrong. How we need this today!

In a day when evil is all about us, and so many do not seem to know the difference between right and wrong, how we need to bring our children "up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6). Guide the child in the formation of a good conscience, and the good conscience will go a long way in guiding the child in the way he should go throughout his entire life.

III. KEEPING A GOOD CONSCIENCE.

Our desire should be what is voiced in Hebrews 13:8, "Pray for us: for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly." This aspiration is further stated by Paul in Acts 24:16, "And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward man." Paul also said that he "renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in

craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God" (II Corinthians 4:2). These verses pretty well sum it up. To have a good conscience we must be willing to live honestly in all things, and we must keep a conscience void of offence toward God and toward man.

Our conscience being formed around the Word of God, we should consistently live by it. "And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him. For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God" (I John 3:19-21). Even as Paul directed: "...let the peace of God rule in your hearts" (Colossians 3:15). In other words, let the peace of God be the umpire in your life. Do what God wants you to do, and you will not have a troubled conscience. Avoid questionable things. For "he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin" (Romans 14:23). Be conscientious.

Keeping a good conscience not only involves living within the bounds of the commands of God and being careful about borderline, questionable things, but it involves the laws of man. We are commanded to obey the laws of the country in which we live in Romans 13 (it being understood that they do not violate the laws of God, Acts 5:29). "Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake" (Romans 13:5). Christians are conscientious people and always want to do that which is right. Although man-made laws are not always absolutes like those of God, we know they are for the well-being of human society, and for "conscience sake" we abide by them.



Keep a good conscience. Keep it well-informed and guided by the Word of God. Yes, keep a good conscience. Do not let it become defiled, calloused, or hardened by sinful living. Do not willfully sin, but when sin occurs always flee to the throne of grace. God has invited you to come (Hebrews 4:14-16; I John 1:8,9). Always strive to have a

clear conscience, one that is at the same time always tender and sensitive before God and man. Be conscientious.

YES, let us realize the utmost importance of Christian and conscience. Paul encouraged and warned Timothy to be holding onto "faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck" (I Timothy 1:19). And, again, remember "the end of the commandment is charity (love) out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned" (I Timothy 1:5). Having obtained and developed a good conscience, let us keep it that way before God. Amen! □

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THE SECRET OF AMERICA

ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE, a famous Frenchman, came to the United States early in the 19th century to study the prison system. After elaborate observation, he wrote: "I sought for the greatness and genius of America in her fertile fields and boundless forests; it was not there. I sought for it in her free schools and her institutions of learning; it was not there. I sought for it in her matchless Constitution and democratic Congress; it was not there. Not until I went to the churches of America and found the pulpits aflame for righteousness, did I understand the greatness and genius of America. America is great because America is good. When America ceases to be good, America will cease to be great." —Copied □

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"HOW IS IT WITH YOU?"

ONE OF the great preachers of a former generation was Dwight L. Moody. Although he was not formally educated to an advanced degree, he was dedicated and persuasive. At the close of one of his addresses, a young man with a notebook in his hand, approached Mr. Moody and said, "I appreciated your sermon, but I have jotted down exactly 22 grammatical errors which you have made." Looking at the young man steadily and kindly, Mr. Moody said, "Yes, it is true that my education was deficient, but I am using all the grammar I know in the service of the Lord. How is it with you?" Well, how is it with you? Are we honestly doing our very best? Does Jesus Christ have our supreme love and loyalty? —CHIMES

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"ARE YOU AN OLD LADY?"

THE STORY is told of a little girl who went to visit her great-grandmother. The elderly lady was a wonderful person, her hair was white; her cheeks though pink, were covered with deep, crisscrossed lines. As the little girl pondered, she asked, "Are you an old lady?" "No, honey," was the quick reply from the grandmother as her eyes, bright with an unconquerable spirit, held a twinkle. "Not exactly, but I must say I've been young for a mighty long time." —Henry L. Fuhry □

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PERFECT THROUGH SUFFERING

“A BAR of iron worth one pound, when made into horse-shoes, is worth two pounds; if made into needles, it is worth seventy pounds; if into penknife blades, it is worth six hundred and fifty pounds; if into springs for watches, it is worth fifty thousand pounds.”

What a drilling the poor bar must undergo to be worth this; but the more it is manipulated, the more it is hammered and passed through the fire and beaten and pounded and polished, the greater it's value.

(A lesson for human beings is here).—Selected □

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TRY THESE SEVEN THINGS

THESE SEVEN THINGS have I tried:

Laughing at difficulties, and I have found them disappearing.

Attempting heavy responsibilities, and I have found them growing lighter.

Facing a bad situation, and I have found it clearing up.

Telling the truth, and I have found it the easiest way out.

Doing an honest day's work, and I have found it most rewarding.

Believing men honest, and I have found them living up to my expectations.

Trusting God each day, and I have found Him surprising me with all His goodness.—Author Unknown □

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MENTAL POISON—DRUGS!

IT IS ALL BUT impossible to overestimate the harmful effects of drugs on families. Drugs change and alter a person's personality to such an extent that they are one of the principle causes of child abuse, spouse beating, failure to accept responsibility, impotence and every harmful consequence imaginable.

By *drugs* I mean anything that alters the function of the human mind. That would include alcohol, barbituates, marijuana, heroin, opium, etc. . . .

We are all familiar with the Art Linkletter family tragedy when their 21 year old daughter got high on LSD and thinking she could fly, jumped out of a fourth-story window, to her death. Yet, what parent could say with any degree of certainty: “That could never happen to my child”?

From a recent issue of *USA TODAY* comes the startling report that children feel pressure to use drugs and drink alcohol as early as the fourth grade. Some 125,000 fourth-graders said that they feel “some to a lot of pressure to try beer, wine, liquor or marijuana.” (*USA TODAY*, “Kids, Drugs and Alcohol”).

And what about marijuana? We have been taught too long by our humanist educators that marijuana is just a little more harmful than a cigarette. Dr. Hardin Jones, professor of Medical Physics and Physiology at University of California, Berkeley, and who is a leading author-

ity on the subject, notes that one or two smokes or “joints” may appear harmless, but marijuana tends to accumulate in the system. He says,

“Now we know by careful chemical measurements taken in the bodies of marijuana users that the drug actually accumulates in the body in a linear way...A week after a person smokes marijuana, 30 percent is still in the body in the active form. There is no other drug that I know of that lingers in the body so long. Of the portion that remains, the body retains 70 percent of that longer than the second week. It gets rid of only 10 percent a month thereafter, so the burden stays in the body for a long period, and as the person uses more and more, it accumulates... What is not realized is that the marijuana user is never completely free of some of these low-grade intoxicative effects. I can see some effects in all marijuana users any time I examine them, even though they haven't used marijuana for hours, days or weeks.” (Hardin B. Jones, “What Marijuana Really Does”—Washington, D.C.: Narcotics Education, Inc.)

Other reports have concluded that even mild marijuana users do damage to their brains. Smoking just three joints a week for ten years can cause permanent brain damage, loss of memory, goal disorientation, male and female sterility. Yes, our future families will be threatened by this “harmless” (?) drug.—GUIDEPOSTS □

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MORE KILLED BY ABORTION THAN ALL WARS

THERE WERE over 2,769,000 American military personnel involved in the Vietnam war. Of this number 58,655 were killed. There were 2,710,345 survivors.

In the last decade over 15,000,000 unborn babies were involved in America's abortion war. There were no survivors.

Since the Roe vs. Wade decision of 1973 (ten years ago) over 15,000,000 (15 million) unborn individuals have been killed by forceps, and burning away of the skin with salt solution. Since 1973, over twelve times as many have died on abortion tables than have died in the American Revolution, Civil War, World War I, World War II, The Korean War and Vietnam combined.

All of this is difficult to reconcile with latest developments in the medical world. Encyclopedia Britannica's Medical and Health Annual, 1983, contains a report titled “Healing the Unborn.” Quoting from the article, “Prenatal medicine is now beginning to be able to intervene, before birth, to alleviate, and even cure conditions that previously compromised the fetus. This promises survival for thousands of threatened lives.”

The same article, written by Mitchell S. Golbus, M.D., contained this startling statement: “This concept that the fetus is a patient, an individual whose disorders are a proper subject for medical therapy has been established.”

More than once in this study, the unborn were referred to in terms which included the following: “individual,” “patient,” “human,” and “life”—words conspicuously absent in pro-abortion rhetoric popularized by secular media.

It sounds much more humane to call it “pro-choice” than to call it “abortion.” And it sounds far more acceptable to consider “termination of the fetus,” than to think of “terminating an individual,” “ending the life of a patient,”

“killing a human,” or “murdering a baby.”

On September 26, *TIME Magazine* carried an article about the “pain” of abortion. Surprisingly, the “pain” to which they referred involved the guilt, fear and anxiety of the men (referred to as “abortion veterans”) who accompanied their wives, girl friends, or lovers to abortion clinics. The article states that “there is almost no one to help the million men who go through it each year.

While *TIME* is busy gathering sympathy for the million “abortion veterans,” it seems fitting for others of us to prayerfully consider the tragedy and horror of 15,000,000 “abortion victims.”—*National Federation for Decency Journal* □

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TWO PHILOSOPHIES OF PREACHING



AT LEAST TWO distinct philosophies and styles of preaching are displayed by those who seek to minister the Word of God. There is the people-centered idea and practice and the God-centered ones. Of the two, the former concept and technique clearly dominate current preaching, while the latter are all but the exception rather than the rule.

The people-centered ministry stems from the sales psychology of the times, which concentrates on highlighting the “customer benefit” to be had from the product being offered. The underlying theory is that if people can be made to think that the product can sufficiently contribute to their satisfaction or need, they will buy it. The task, thus, becomes one of so convincing the public, and in the area of sales promotion that objective is pursued virtually without regard to the facts in the case or the representation made of them.

As it has been adapted to preaching, this attitude seeks first of all to gratify the desires and meet the needs—real or fancied—of the people. It may very well be that the Bible is given much prominence in the endeavor, being freely cited. The Scriptures, however, are always directly related to the end of the preacher—that of “customer benefit,” or the pleasing of the hearers. Such a ministry comes to degenerate into a mere “proof-text” use of the sacred writings, in which their only relevance is their service of the user’s immediate designs. Neither God nor His Word are loved and revered for themselves—only for what they

have to offer people.

This kind of preaching, obviously, reproaches the great God of heaven and earth and the message which He has designed to give mankind. It reduces the Godhead to little short of errand-boy for the service of a demanding humanity. Do you have any need at all? God can meet it. Are you discouraged? God can cheer you up. Are you confused? He can straighten you out. Are you frustrated? The Bible can show you the way to victory and self-fulfillment. Do you have financial difficulties? Turn to God, and He will take care of them. And, of course, are you sick—anything from a minor sore throat or a stubbed toe on up the scale? Well, Christ is the great Physician, and will heal all of your physical infirmities. So are God and His Word presented as the divine Problem Solver—of earthly and physical ones, that is. (Sin and salvation from it—the fundamental benefit God has for humanity—at best playsecond fiddle in this type of preaching.) And the preacher is ready with Scripture verses aplenty in “proof” of his claims.

The other kind of the Word’s ministry—the God-centered variety—approaches the matter from an entirely different direction. Although it is fully mindful of the human situation, with its many and divers needs, it does not seek to subjugate God and the Scriptures to these considerations. Instead, it seeks first the Father and His righteousness and truth. God-centered preaching’s preeminent concern is to declare Him and His will for mankind, to acquaint the hearers with God, and to constrain them to do His will. It therefore, approaches the Scriptures, not primarily to find the answers to all of people’s problems, but to find God and to become saturated with His Mind as it is revealed therein.

Having thus apprehended God through the Son, and come to know something of His Word, the preacher so actuated goes into his pulpit burning with a message from on high. He has a genuine Word from God, and the obsession of his soul is to communicate it to the people. In that communication, of course, he will endeavor to relate the message to the hearers. But it is the message that has captured his heart, as it will the hearts of others who receive it. And the preacher depends on that captivating force to do its work, rather than the self-serving power supposedly generated in the people-centered message.

There is a vast difference between these two philosophies and examples of preaching. The one attempts to harness God to the burdens of humanity, with the burdens as the primary concern (God being important only as He ministers to them). The other, emerging from the heavenly temple with the light and might of Jehovah, endeavors to shed forth these qualities upon its impotent audience. And the audience, if it hears aright, finds that in that irradiation it is lifted out of the flesh into the Spirit, and in that elevation discovers God’s efficacious ministry to its needs.

The latter method, it is true, demands more of the preacher. Undoubtedly, that accounts for the scarcity of its employment. But the glory to God and the blessed effectiveness for people which it produces makes the added effort abundantly worthwhile.—*The Banner of Truth.* □

Do small things as though they were great things—and you will soon be doing great things as though they were small things.

IS IT ALL A FAIRY TALE?

RECENTLY THIS WRITER in his travels saw a little different "Christmas" scene (scenes) on display in glowing lights, framed by the darkness of the night, in the front lawn of a Maryland residence. In fact, we looked twice at what we saw. In the background close to the house was the typical manger scene of the Christ-child. Then a step forward toward the highway on the left was Santa Claus and his reindeer dashing through the night. But the first thing that greeted the eyes at the right of the yard next to the highway was Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. A little unusual to say the least!

But the message came through clear and plain—it is all a fairy tale, an enjoyable myth! The Christ-child, Santa Claus, and Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs are all on the same plain. Even for the unthinking, subconsciously this conclusion would register in their minds. The most wonderful truth in the world that God became flesh in the form of the Christ-child to be our Saviour is relegated to a fairy tale. It is not to be taken seriously, but put in the same category of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs.

And this "Christmas" scene in Maryland is a stunning indictment of those who think it is an innocent and harmless thing to tell their children that there is a Santa Claus (even giving attributes of God to Santa Claus). Santa Claus, Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, and the Christ-child are all in the same bag. When children learn that they have been lied to about Santa Claus, it is but one step for them to doubt the Christ-child. To our unbelieving age it is all a fairy tale anyway.

Christianity is characterized by truth. There is no place for fairy tales, mythology, and the traditions of men to be in association with it. So much of that which is false is tied to this time of the year called "Christmas" (CHRIST-MASS) that it behooves the faithful New Testament Christian to stand aloft from it. In fact, even from the Biblical viewpoint, we are not commanded to observe the birthday of Christ nor do we know exactly when he was born.

Let us be content to honor and worship Christ, the Son of God, in the way the New Testament reveals and not just show empty homage to a babe in the manger. —J. Gibbons □

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THE COST OF CONSECRATED LIVING

It cost ABRAHAM the yielding up of his son.
It cost DANIEL to be cast in the lion's den.
It cost STEPHEN death by stoning.
It cost PETER a martyr's death.
It cost PAUL to be beheaded.
It cost JESUS to die on the cross.

—DOES IT COST YOU ANYTHING?

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WHICH IS WORSE, AN ATHEIST OR A CHRISTIAN?
(professing Christian)

1. One who does not believe in God or one who believes in Him, but does not serve Him?
2. One who does not believe the Bible, or one who does but never reads it?
3. One who does not believe in prayer, or one who does

but never prays?

4. One who does not believe in the church, or one who believes, but never attends, does not support it regularly, does not pray for it and very often criticizes it?

WHO is worse? You answer this one!—*Christian Clarion*

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THREE PREACHERS AND THEIR WEAKNESSES

THE STORY goes of three preachers who were out in their boat fishing. Far removed from the ears of an unfriendly world, they "let their hair down" and began to talk about their weaknesses. The first said that his conscience was bothering him. There was something he had to confess to someone. He was a little too fascinated by the opposite sex and had been indiscreet. The second preacher, emboldened by the openness of the first, said that he too had a weakness. Although no one knew it, he had to have a drink from the bottle every once in a while. Now their eyes were on the third preacher. Since they had been so frank, would he too confess a fault? "Yes" the third preacher did indeed have a weakness, he confessed. "My weakness is gossip. How I love to talk! And I just can't wait to get away from here!"

This little story may be humorous, but there may be an underlying point which is very real and not humorous. Gossip may be the besetting sin of many preachers. In his chapter on the tongue, James starts out by saying, "My brethren, be not many masters (don't many of you be teachers or preachers), knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation (the more severe judgment)" (James 3). Then he proceeds to talk about the tongue. Preachers have people to confide in them, and they generally are exposed to more and know more which they could talk about. It is unforgivable to betray a trust, but some preachers have even been heard to use such cases as sermon illustrations. Many times when preachers gather there is more gossiping going on than there is preaching. Remember: "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man" (Colossians 4:6). And our Lord said, "But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned" (Matthew 12:36,37; also notice I Timothy 5:12,13).

—J. GIBBONS

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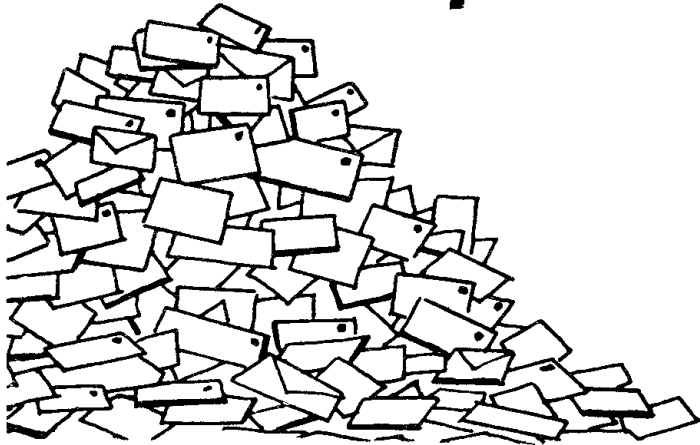
THROUGH THE CONCERN OF OTHERS

THE NEW TESTAMENT records tell of 40 people, each suffering from some disease, who had been healed by Jesus. Of this number, 34 were either brought to Jesus by friends or Jesus was taken to them. In only 6 cases out of 40 did sufferers find their way to Christ without assistance. One wonders whether the percentage would be any different today. Of the vast number of people who find their way to Jesus, most of them will reach Him because of the interest and cooperation of friends genuinely interested and concerned about their spiritual welfare.—*The Voice* □

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READERS'

... Response



MISSOURI:

■ *"I have always appreciated THE SWORD AND STAFF these many years. I hope that God gives you physical and spiritual strength for many more."*

IOWA:

■ *"I just finished reading an issue of your paper THE SWORD AND STAFF (Vol. 21, 1983, No. 3). I want you to know just how much I enjoyed this issue! Your paper contains (at least THIS issue) an even balance between the negative and the positive. It contains articles and bits that are designed to rebuke and also those designed to lift and inspire the spirit. I have always believed in a good balance between "afflicting the comfortable" and "comforting the afflicted." Your paper seems to strike that balance very nicely.*

"I have read brotherhood journals that seem to know nothing but "raking people across the coals." They capitalize on criticism and name-calling. I have read journals that seem to stress the positive to the neglect of the negative. They seldom if ever "rebuke," and seem to always try to make people "feel good." I do not believe that either of these is correct. I believe we need a balance between the two. You seem to do that, and I appreciate it very much.

"...May God richly bless you in every effort for good!"

MICHIGAN:

■ *"My husband and I would really love to make the trip to the Holy Lands and must say your article made it even more desirable. Please add our name to the list and we'll appreciate being kept informed..."*

ILLINOIS:

■ *"I greatly enjoy reading THE SWORD AND STAFF, devouring each issue. Thanks for sending it and making this ministry available to myself and others..."*

WEST VIRGINIA:

■ *"...I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for a wonderful, true-to-the-Bible, top-quality paper. There*

are precious few of these around, and I know that it's a joy to the heart of any true worshipper of God to get gems like this through the mail. Keep up the good work! (1 Cor. 15:58)..."

VIRGINIA:

■ *"I trust this offering for the Lord's work will help somewhat in your work of getting out THE SWORD AND STAFF. I pray that you can continue to print it, because it surely means a lot to many others as it does to me. I praise God for the help I receive from the articles in it..."* □

I WAS THERE TOO

IN A PAINTING of the crucifixion by the famous Dutch artist Rembrandt, your attention, of course, is drawn first of all to the cross and to Him who hangs there. Then you look at the crowd that is gathered around the cross and note the attitudes and actions of these people. As your eyes drift to the edge of the picture you see another figure standing in the shadow. This is Rembrandt himself—Rembrandt helping to crucify Jesus! How true that is! The crucifixion is not merely an historical fact. It is a personal experience...It may be an interesting pastime to point fingers at those who crucified Jesus, but it is a shocking thought that I can be as indifferent as Pilate, as scheming as Caiaphas, as callous as the soldiers, as ruthless as the mob, as cowardly as the disciples. It isn't just what they did...

*'Twas I that shed the sacred blood,
I nailed Him to the tree,
I crucified the Christ of God,
I joined the mockery!*

I look again and in the shadows with Rembrandt, I am there!—*The Light* □

PEG-LEG RELIGION

TOO MANY PEOPLE have a religion that is just like a wooden leg. There is neither warmth nor life in it. And although it helps them to hobble along through life, it never becomes a part of them. They have to strap it on every Sunday morning.—*Selected* □

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IF BAPTISM—

is for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38)
washes away sins (Acts 22:16)
is into Christ (Galatians 3:27)
is into the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13)
saves (1 Peter 3:21)

THEN WHAT IS YOUR CONDITION WITHOUT BAPTISM?

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★



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