

The Sword AND Staff

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

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

THIS IS NOT INTENDED to be an exhaustive treatment of this subject, but I wish for us to realize that man's relationship to God has two sides. Too long we have emphasized one side to the exclusion and hurtful neglect of the other. Too many times we vaunt ourselves and think in terms of what we have done. We turn God's intended righteousness into our own self-righteousness. But, beloved, I think it is high time that we give God the glory that is due Him! Let us consider this now.

I. Giving God the Glory in Becoming a Christian

First, *let us realize there is something man must "do" before he can be saved.* The Lord Jesus said, in view of His coming kingdom (the church), "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven: but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21). Mark 16:16 tells us that man must believe and be baptized before he can be saved. The believing Jews on the Day of Pentecost were told to repent and be baptized for the remission of their sins (Acts 2:38); then the apostle Peter continued, "Save yourselves from this untoward generation" (2:40). The Romans had become the servants of righteousness by obeying from the heart that form of doctrine delivered unto them (Romans 6:17). Yes, man is a responsible, free-moral agent accountable unto God.

However, *let us fully realize that we are primarily responding to what God has done.* Man is saved by his belief and response to the gospel (Mark 16:16). The gospel is what God has done as it relates to man. It is the good news of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ (I Corinthians 15:1-4). While men were yet

sinners, unknowing and unthankful, Jesus died for them (Romans 5:6-8). Ephesians 2 tells us that we are saved by grace, which is unmerited favor reflected in what God has done for sinful man. "For he (GOD) hath made him (JESUS) to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (II Corinthians 5:21). Thus, we "save ourselves" only in a secondary sense—by accepting the free gift of salvation already procured for us by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Finally, *let us say that we are responding to what God is doing.* A most interesting thing is said of Lydia, the lady who became Paul's first convert in Europe. Listen: "Lydia. . . whose heart the Lord opened" (Acts 16:14,15). I am not proposing the dogmatic doctrine of Calvinistic predestination, for this is not in harmony with the rest of the Bible (Romans 2:6-11; I Timothy 2:4; etc.). But God is given the credit for opening her heart, whether it be by special providence or the quickening power of the simple gospel upon an honest heart. To continue the thought in another book, Paul states that man is not saved by his own works of human merit, then goes on to say, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works which God hath before ordained (prepared) that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:9,10). Then listen: "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost" (Titus 3:5). A parallel Scripture is found in Acts 2:38. Truly it is God at work with us when we repent and are baptized; even baptism is a work of God (not human merit for the blood of Christ is applied here).

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Giving GOD the GLORY



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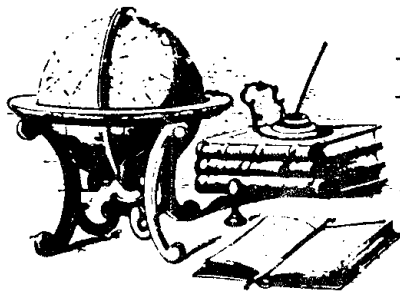
THE SWORD AND STAFF

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EDITORIAL

COMMENTS. . .

REACTIONARYISM, THE PLAN OF SALVATION, AND GRACE

HOW PITIFUL we many times are (even in the name of religion) as poor spiritually deficient human beings. Spiritual things in the hands of the “spiritual” and the “super-spiritual,” who may not be as knowing and spiritual as they would like to think, may really suffer. More than once these religious reactionaries have “botched up” in confronting error.

In times past it has been taught that we are saved by human righteousness and prescribed ecclesiastical works. The reactionary doctrine that came into being confronting this was “faith only.” Later, some, seeing the fallacy of this, taught that faith and works go together; they compliment one another. And, in effort to augment this truth, baptism was again emphasized as part of the plan of salvation. Then what man does in accepting Christ was called the “plan of salavation” (faith, repentance, confession, and baptism), although this is just a “tip of the iceberg.” Instead of the centrality of our preaching being Christ (what God has done), it can become centered in what man must do (and this needs to be preached in its proper perspective—*sinners must know WHAT they are doing and WHY they are doing it*). But not to be heavy on preaching the person of Christ (which is really what produces saving faith), and to preach only the mechanics of what man must do to be saved (dubbed the “plan of salvation”), is to “convert” men to a “plan of salvation” and not to Christ. Law could not produce obedience and righteousness. That is why Christ died for us. By God’s grace we are forgiven and through faith in the resurrected and living Christ we are able to get a sustained victory over sin. We are not alone pulling our own little “red wagon.” But, if we preach only on what man must do and do not introduce them to the one who makes it possible (and gives them power to do it), we get them off on the wrong footing (if indeed, we get them off). Don’t be surprised if people who are converted to a mechanical plan of salvation of what they must do and are never introduced to a personal and living Saviour; yes, don’t be surprised if their obedience after baptism is mechanical and lifeless. (Is this the reason we have so many worldly “church members” today? They don’t know Christ).

Then, as we enjoy God’s grace and drink of the waters of life freely, let us not (in our human frailty) misunderstand and abuse the grace of God. When some people “rediscover” (or think they have) the doctrine of the grace of God, they want to dismantle the commands of God. This is not right. As one brother said, “Unfortunately many who are beginning to emphasize these themes of God’s grace and Christ’s atoning work have a corresponding lack of concern for abiding in all things Christ commanded and the apostles taught. Some of these have an al-

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**Proverbially
SPEAKING. . .**

If we are bold against sin, but are not humble with it, we appear to be self-righteous.

“When a man who is honestly mistaken hears the truth, he will either quit being mistaken or cease being honest.”

God will not tolerate a church that tolerates sin and false teaching.

“The Christ we do not share we can not keep.”

Believe in God, not gimmicks; believe in Christ, not contests.

“The LORD’S DOING, and not ours, is to ‘be marvelous in our eyes’.”

When you come to the end of your rope, tie a knot and hang on.

“Weeds in the garden (Genesis 3:18) and weeds in the heart all provide evidence of the fall of man.”

Your life must be related to something higher than you are or you will be inferior than you are.

“It is true that a man’s temperament may make it easier to act in a certain way, but he is never thereby forced to do or not to do.”

“Just in so far as you allow yourself to be ruled in youth by a selfish love or pleasure, in so far do you incapacitate yourself for love.”

Baptism is preceded by faith, but baptism also EXPRESSES faith and EMBODIES the faith it expresses.



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Beloved, let us give God the glory for our conversion to Him! Without Him we are nothing. Most definitely we must obey His commands, but in doing so we are simply responding to His grace—what He has already done. His righteousness is counted to be our righteousness, and we are forgiven. We are responding to what God is actively doing through His grace and His living Word as we come to Him “from whom all blessings flow.” Praise Him, and glory to His Name!

II. Giving God the Glory in Remaining a Christian

First, *let us look at the Christian's works*. We have stressed it from the viewpoint of human works so long that we fail to appreciate the hand of God at work in our lives (if indeed we have surrendered enough for it to be at work). We are emphatic about this human element: “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12), but have never taken the time to notice that this verse follows: “For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do his good pleasure” (2:13). Likewise read Philippians 1:6; I Thessalonians 2:13; Hebrews 13:20,21; etc. Paul said that he labored more abundantly than the other apostles, although it was not he, but God working in him (I Corinthians 15:10; Colossians 1:28,29). Jude admonishes, “Keep yourselves in the love of God” (Jude 21), then goes on to say, “Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling” (Jude 24). We also see this two-sided matter in I Peter 1:5. Oh, yes, beloved, we must work as Christians, but upon our devotion and doing so, the Lord enters into the picture to direct and work through us to accomplish His precious will. Give God the glory for whatever thing, small or great, that He may see fitting to bring about through us.

Next, *a Christian's works are essential, not as works of human merit, but as works of faith and obedience*. Paul to the Philippians pointed out that he counted all things but refuse, including personal righteousness attained by a system of merit (as found in the law of Moses), that he might gain Christ and know his redeeming righteousness (Philippians 3:8,9). If we work to build up a storehouse of merit (as such) to receive the reward of salvation we destroy the validity of grace (Romans 4:1-4). However, the writer James makes it clear that works are essential to salvation, not as works of merit, but as works of faith (James 2:15-26). The Lord expects our faith to be expressed in the

appropriate obedience before it is effectual in saving us, or in keeping us saved. Herein denominationalism stumbles in denying the necessity of baptism. It is not a work of human merit (for the merit of the blood of Christ is applied for the sinner then); it is a work of faith. “Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead” (Colossians 2:12).

Perhaps *it is well that we contrast the law of Moses (merit) with the law of faith (Christ)*. Some seem to think that we eradicate law altogether by the gospel of Jesus, but this does not seem to be the case. Paul declares that we are not justified by the law of Moses (merit) (Romans 3:27,28). Then he continues, “Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid; yea, we establish the law” (3:31). The law of Christ establishes responsibility. Paul combats the mistaken notion that it doesn't in the 6th chapter of Romans. In fact, the law of Christ goes deeper and further than the law of Moses. The sermon on the mount shows that the righteousness in Christ's kingdom must exceed that of the outward legalism alone of the Pharisees (Matthew 5:20-48). The letter of the law must be kept, or there can be no law, *period* (.), legally or spiritually. But the teachings of the Lord went further, involving the heart and great principles surrounding the command itself. The law of Moses is like a father giving certain rules for his young and immature children; the law of Christ is like those children when they have grown up—they no longer follow a system of rules *as such*, but the great principles surrounding the earlier teaching of their father guides them through life. They have been incorporated into the very essence of their personalities to become a vital and living part of them.

Before we conclude, let us say that we could never be saved without the grace of God (that's what it's all about). All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:10,23). I don't care if you quit sinning inasmuch as you humanly can to become a good moral person. That can never *undo* the wrong things you have done, and the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). You need the precious blood of Jesus to take away your sins. Look at the awful suffering and death of Jesus. This should prove to you forever that you cannot save yourself by yourself, by your own moral goodness (although essential in remaining a Christian). Otherwise, beloved, Jesus made a terrible mistake in dying that awful death. Be humble—ever so humble! Give God the glory! And accept His general amnesty for all offenders against heaven while the offer is still open.

Man has a definite responsibility toward his own salvation, but God has already taken the initiative. Now man must responsively act. Upon man acting, he will find that he is being acted upon. The hand of God will be upon his surrendered life. This does not mean you can never revoke the action of God, nor fall from grace. But if you possess salvation, having come to God unconditionally, you will soon find that salvation possesses you. Your life will be like the growing rose, sprouting and budding in this life to blossom and

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Giving GOD the GLORY

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bloom throughout eternity. There is no reason to vaunt ourselves and be self-righteous. Let us give God the glory for all things—now and for eternity! Praise His Name! AMEN! *(This article first appeared in the first issue of the revived SWORD AND STAFF, January 1967).* □

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REDEEMING THE TIME

“TOMORROW, and tomorrow, and tomorrow creeps into this petty pace from day to day” till time is spent and eternity has begun. Before we get well adjusted to this terrestrial testing ground, time has told its tale. Time, as a fleeting deer pursued by the hungry hounds of death, is swallowed up into eternity. Seeds of decay are all about us, and all are subject to sin. All know that the cradle only foreshadows the grave. We are born to die, yet with each of us is a yearning that transcends this realm of existence and reaches to the heart of God. Men are creatures of eternity confined to earth for a season. . . then after that the judgment.

Do not ask me to define *eternity*. Some say that it is time without end, but it is beyond anything that man has experienced in time. This is a very inferior way to try to describe eternity. However, man cannot describe something that he has not experienced. The best that we can do is to use earthly tools to convey heavenly things. I cannot explain space. . . if a man would go straight out into open space, would he ever come to a stopping place? To a place where there was no more space? I do not have the answer, nor can I explain eternity. Nonetheless, the Word of God says that heaven and hell are equally everlasting or eternal.

But I do know this. Paul the inspired declared, “Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation” (II Corinthians 6:2). We are living in an area or span of life subject to time. We find the human race bound, wallowing and self-inflicted in sin—sinners, and thus alienated from God. None are innocent (except the very youngest) and none are exempted from God’s corresponding wrath against sin. The day of God’s wrath is coming as surely as night follows day. Sinner, now is the accepted time to free yourself from the burden and guilt of sin. After the sun has gone down for your soul it will be too late. Life is a springboard into eternity. Unless you prepare to meet God while here, you will never be prepared. Heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people (even as hell is a prepared place for an unprepared people).

Then with the apostle Paul we further admonish, “Redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (Ephesians 5:16). Oh, Beloved, think of the time that is wasted in senseless trivia in view of the coming wrath of God! We are informed that the average American family spends more time watching TV than in making a living. Think of the Great Commission and then of the countless souls that are going out into a Christless eternity. It is even as James said, “Therefore to him

that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin” (James 4:17). Think of what manner of lives we should be living before an ungodly world, showing them that God is real and how they must live to please God.—*J. Gibbons* □

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GOD’S FORGIVENESS

THERE WAS a king who had suffered much from his rebellious subjects. But one day they surrendered their arms, threw themselves at his feet, and begged for mercy.

He pardoned them all. One of his friends said to him, “Did you not say that every rebel must die?”

“Yes,” replied the king, “but I see no rebels here.” □

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HOW WOULD WE FEEL?

IF GOD gave us the same amount of time and attention that we devote to Him?

If God put as many things ahead of us as we put ahead of Him?

If God offered as many excuses as we do? And if the excuses were no more justifiable than ours?

If God’s promises were no more certain than ours?

If God withheld His blessings from us as we withhold our offerings from Him?

If God loved Himself as much as we love ourselves and gave as little thought to us as we give to Him?

“GIVE OF YOUR BEST TO THE MASTER.”

—*Selected*

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“LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE”

A RAILROAD WATCHMAN was stationed at a dangerous crossing. An accident occurred at that crossing in which a number of people were killed. An inquest was held and the watchman was called to testify.

“Were you present at the time the accident occurred?” he was asked. “Oh, yes, I was on duty,” he declared. “And did you go out to the track when you heard the train approaching to warn travelers of the danger?” “Yes, indeed,” was the reply, “I stood right in the middle of the road.” “Did you have your lantern with you?” “And did you wave the lantern?” Once again the watchman answered both questions in the affirmative. So the watchman was dismissed, and acquitted.

Later as the watchman retold the account of the inquest, he concluded by mopping his brow and exclaiming, “The judge had me in a bad spot with all his questions. But never did he get around to asking me whether the lantern was lit.”

Our love for Jesus will cause us to let our light shine, not mainly to save bodies at railroad crossings, but to save souls eternally.

“Let your light shine” (Matthew 5:16). —*Selected* □

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EDITORIAL COMMENTS. . .

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most ‘anything goes’ attitude regarding matters in the assembly as well as personal commitment to a righteous, unworldly lifestyle. Some appear to be approaching a ‘once-saved, always saved’ position, if not in preaching, at least in practice. They apparently believe that God’s grace will cover their carelessness and Christ’s blood will wash away their even purposeful sin and disregard for holy living.” (And some, who think they have rediscovered the doctrine of the grace of God, use it as a club with which to hit their brethren over the head rather than presenting it in all of its beauty and preaching it and enjoying it for what it is).

God’s grace is His unmerited favor toward us in forgiving us, not in saving us in our sins. Of Mary it is said, “And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people **from** their sins” (Matthew 1:21). “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein. . .What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid” (Romans 6). “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present age; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Titus 2:11-14). (Yes, the Bible presents a responsible view of grace).

BELOVED, let us be humble and keep a level-headed view of the Word of God. Many have a tendency to be like a pendulum in a clock. From one extreme they go to another. Let us have a Scripturally balanced presentation of the Word of God.—*Editor* □

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IGNORING THE POSSIBILITY OF DEFEAT

CHARLES KETTERING, an inventor and scientist, believed that the simplest and easiest way to overcome failure was to totally ignore any possibility of defeat. He once gave a tough assignment to a researcher at General Motors Laboratory. He absolutely refused to allow this researcher to read the notes and articles on that subject which had been written by the so-called experts who had concluded that the task was

impossible. The researcher did not know that it was impossible, and he went to work with confidence that he would succeed. The astonishing thing is that he did succeed. He simply did not know it could not be done, so he did it.

I carry in my wallet a cartoon clip from the comic strip Garfield. It’s a picture of Garfield and his friend Odie. Odie, of course, is a dog. The interesting thing about the picture is that Garfield and Odie are both sitting in the top of a tree. Everyone knows that dogs can’t climb trees. The caption has Garfield saying, “It’s amazing what one can accomplish when one doesn’t know what one can’t do.”

Philippians 4:13 is one of the most powerful verses in all of Scripture. It simply says, “I can do everything through Him who gives me strength.” It contains all the ingredients necessary for dynamic living. It addresses the proper relationship between God and his people. It promises the gift of divine strength to meet our every human need.

Negative thinking abounds in our world. But negative thinking is not usually found in successful people. Negative thinking should be as unnatural to the Christian as flying would be to a fish. If we begin to ignore the possibility of failure in our lives, the result would be nothing short of a revolution.

I encourage you to evaluate what you say in the next 24 hours. Keep a mental record of your speech ; determine if most of what you say is negative or positive. And then, for the next three days avoid all negatives. Memorize and repeat often Philippians 4:13. Let that be your motto for a more productive and more meaningful life. That’s a challenge.—*The Challenge*

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LIVE A LITTLE RECKLESSLY

IF YOU STOP giving the moment it begins to hurt, you never discover true generosity.

If you stop serving the moment it pinches you, you never discover sacrifice and rewards.

If you quit loving the moment it becomes difficult, you never discover compassion.

If you refuse to forgive in the moment that cries for revenge, you never discover the grace of unconditional forgiveness.

If you hesitate to share yourself the moment it costs, you never discover intimate fellowship.

Joy comes to those who don’t know when to quit, who can’t draw the line, who live, give, and forgive a little recklessly.—*Selected* □

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THANK GOD FOR LITTLE THINGS

Thank you, God, for little things that come our way;
The things we take for granted, and don’t mention when we pray;

The unexpected courtesy, the thoughtful kindly deed;
A hand reached out to help us in the time of sudden need;
Oh make us more aware, dear God, of little daily graces
That come to us with “sweet surprise” from never dreamed of places. —*Selected*



JESUS DIED
on the cross
because
man's best
was not good enough.

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TOO HORRIBLE TO EXIST

ABOUT A CENTURY AGO a group of atheists decided to show the world what a fine civilization could be built if only the "superstitions of Christianity" were excluded. They founded the little town of "Liberal," Missouri; and they boastingly advertized that it was the "only town of its kind in the United States." It was without preacher, priest, church, God, Christ, Hell or the Devil!

Some months later the St. Louis *Post-Dispatch* carried a lengthy story about the town of "Liberal," in which it was pictured as the seat of the Devil and a den of iniquity. Its hotels were brothels, and vice had become virtue. Gambling, stealing, drunkenness and brawls were the usual occurrences of the day.

The story was so frightening that the men of Liberal had Clark Braden, the author of the story, arrested for criminal libel, and sued the *Post-Dispatch* for \$25,000. In the trial, the evidence of wickedness was so overwhelming that the jury took but a few minutes to render a verdict in favor of the defendants. The suit was dismissed, and the town of "Liberal" paid all the court costs.

The town of "Liberal" was an absolute failure. It was not long until lifelong atheists, who had moved into the town to enjoy its advantages, left in complete disgust. They found living in an atheistic town intolerable. One of their number confessed that "an infidel surrounded by Christians may spout his infidelity and be able to endure it, but a whole town of atheists was too horrible to contemplate."—*The Good News* □

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The AWESOME RESPONSIBILITY of RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP

MEN ASPIRE to positions of leadership in the church for different reasons. Needless to say, it should be because of a holy desire for the advancement of God's eternal kingdom. It should be because we have a deep love for God and man and truth—and are committed to truth and righteousness (yes,

unreservedly, and unselfishly, committed to the salvation of men's souls in relationship to the truth of God which cannot be compromised). There should be a sense of urgency and calling. But this is not always the case. Some are motivated by selfish aspirations. Materialism may enter the picture. Others may be filled with pride and be on an ego trip. Some actually have a fleshly pride in being able to get up and speak and vaunt themselves over others. Some love the praise of men, and the attention they get, and have little regard in getting down to business in preaching (or teaching) the Word of God. Evil goes unopposed. No doubt, there are too many professional hirelings today in "THE MINISTRY" (whatever that means) who preach just what the people want to hear who pay them. But, please, may all read II Timothy 4:1-5.

Following is a listing of some Scriptures showing the seriousness (yea, the awesome responsibility) of being a leader in things religious. We think of leaders as being such men as preachers, elders, and teachers. This is presented not to discourage anyone from aspiring to leadership, but to help "shake up" those who are superficially motivated and to help the sincere in their aspirations to be properly directed. Leadership in the Lord's church is an awesome responsibility. How the leaders need to be really prepared for their work and then to do it. Leaders will be subjected to a more severe judgment from God in that Great Day.

—"My brethren, be not many masters (many of you teachers), knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation (judgment)" (JAMES 3:1).

—"Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch" (MATTHEW 15:14).

—"But whoso shall offend (cause of stumble) one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea" (MATTHEW 18:6).

—"But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in" (MATTHEW 23:13; read the whole chapter).

—"Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God" (ACTS 20:26, 27).

—"But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed" (GALATIANS 1:8).

—"Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine (teaching); continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee" (I TIMOTHY 4:16).

—"Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you" (HEBREWS 13:17).

The Universality of the UNIVERSAL FLOOD

WE ARE TOLD that over 300 accounts exist among the various peoples of the world of the earth being destroyed by a great flood (or the equivalent) and of those who survived. These legends and traditions have come down from very ancient times. The descendants of Noah as they went their various ways upon the water-cleansed face of the earth kept alive the great happening by word of mouth. As time went by the accounts were naturally somewhat modified, but the central truth of the Flood remained. And as various peoples sank into idolatry, their accounts became colored by mythological thought and imagery. In the Bible we have the pure and unadulterated version of what really happened. However, the fact that there are so many accounts widespread among the various strands of humanity points to the underlying fact that the Flood actually happened. How interesting!

The Babylonian Tradition of the Flood

Berosus, a Babylonian of 300 B.C., basing his history on the archives of the Temple of Marduk in Babylon relates that Xisuthrus, a king, was warned by one of the gods, to build a ship, and take his friends and relatives and all different kinds of animals, with all necessary food. Whereupon he built an immense ship, which was stranded in Armenia. Upon the subsidence of the Flood, he sent out birds; the third time they returned not. He came out, builded an altar, and offered up sacrifice. A more ancient version of the tradition is contained on the Flood Tablets, found by George Smith, 1872, in the Library of Assurbanipal at Nineveh, which were copied from tablets dating back to the First Dynasty of Ur (a period about midway between Abraham and the Flood).

Other Traditions

Egyptians had a legend that the gods at one time purified the earth by a great flood from which only a few shepherds escaped by climbing a mountain. *Greek*: Deucalion, warned that the gods were going to bring a flood upon the earth for its great wickedness, built an ark, which rested on Mt. Parnassus; a dove was sent out twice. *Hindu*: Manu, warned, built a ship, in which he alone escaped from a Deluge which destroyed all creatures. *Chinese*: Fa-He, founder of Chinese civilization, who is represented as having escaped from a Flood because man had rebelled against heaven, appears as the first man in a renovated world with his wife, 3 sons and 3 daughters. *England*: the Druids had a legend that the world had been repopled from a righteous patriarch who had been saved in a strong ship from a Flood sent by the Supreme Being to destroy mankind for their wickedness. *Polynesians* have stories of a Flood in which a family of 8 escaped in a canoe. *Mexicans*: one man, his wife and children, were saved in a ship from a Flood which overwhelmed the earth; when the ship rested on a mountain a vulture and a dove were sent out. *Peruvian*: one man and one

woman were saved in a box that floated on the flood waters. *American Indians*: of more than 100 tribes every tribe has a story of 1, 3, or 8 persons being saved in a boat above the waters on a high mountain. *Greenland*: The earth was once tilted over, and all men were drowned, except one who smote afterwards on the ground with a stick, and thence came out a woman, with whom he peopled the earth again.

Universality of the Tradition

Babylonians, Assyrians, Egyptians, Hindus, Persians, Greeks, Phrygians, Chinese, Fiji Islanders, Esquimaux, Aboriginal Americans, Indians, Brazilians, Peruvians, indeed every branch of the whole human race, Semitic, Aryan, Turanian,—have traditions of the Great Deluge that destroyed all mankind except one family, and which impressed itself indelibly on the memory of the ancestors of these races before they separated. "All these myths are intelligible only on the supposition that some such event did actually occur. Such a universal belief, not springing from some instinctive principle of our nature, must be based on an historical fact." (most of material from *Pocket Bible Handbook* by H.H. Halley). □

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

"BRING THE BOOKS, ESPECIALLY THE PARCHMENTS"

PAUL WAS A prisoner in Rome. Winter was coming on, and he had left his cloak with Carpus at Troas. For this reason, when he wrote Timothy to come, he made a request for him to bring the cloak, but especially his books and parchments (2 Timothy 4:13). This request is truly significant! The apostle says in effect:

"Let the winter come! Let me shiver! Let me freeze! I would like a heavy cloak; but if there is shortage of baggage space, BRING THE BOOKS. My study must not be neglected!"

(Christians) who think, for one reason or another, that they can afford to neglect the study of the Holy Bible are mistaken. Nothing on this earth is more important than a thorough knowledge of God's Word.

—The Minister's Monthly

THE OLD MAN BY THE FIRE

An old man sat by the open fire,
And dreamed the years away;
While outside in the battle of life
Many perished in the toils of day.
He never did any good, nor did he
ever do any wrong,
He just sat by the open fire,
And dreamed the whole day long.
Now he's left a vacant chair,
And they say he's gone up higher.
But if he still does what he used to do,
He's still sitting by the fire.

—Selected

RULES FOR TODAY

- 1. Do nothing that you would not like to be doing when Jesus comes.
- 2. Go to no place where you would not like to be found when Jesus comes.
- 3. Saying nothing that you would not like to be saying when Jesus comes.—*Selected* □

★★★★★★

“NOT ON THE SCRAP HEAP”

A BLACKSMITH who was known for his strong faith had a grave illness. He was challenged by an unbeliever to explain why God would let him suffer.

His explanation went like this: “I take a piece of iron, put it in the fire, and bring it to a white heat. Then I strike it once or twice on the anvil to see if it will take a temper. I plunge it into the water to change the temperature, put it into the fire again and then put it on the anvil and make it into a useful article. If it will not take a temper when I first strike it on the anvil, I throw it into the scrap heap and sell it at a low rate. I believe God has been testing me to see if I will take a temper. I have tried to bear it patiently as I could, and my daily prayer has been, ‘Lord, put me into the fire if you will; put me into the water if you think I need it; do anything you please, O Lord, only DON’T THROW ME ON THE SCRAP HEAP!’ ”—*Selected* □

★★★★★★

KILLED BY HIS OWN POISON

IN SOUTHWEST TEXAS there is a species of cactus known by the Mexicans as “Tasajilla,” which is made up of long-jointed stems having extremely long thorns with wicked points.

In that section there are also many rattlesnakes, enemies of man and beast, some attaining a length of six or seven feet. This venomous reptile is, however, also plagued by enemies. One of these is a long-legged bird known popularly as a road-runner and by the Mexicans as a paisano. It is commonly seen running across and along the highways of southwest Texas. It is a bird with long black legs and beak and is mottled grey in color. Many rattlesnakes are executed by this innocuous looking creature.

The execution takes place in the following fashion. The bird will find the snake asleep; he will carefully gather a supply of the little spine-like joints of the tasajilla bush and with them build a fence or corral around the sleeping snake; having finished the fence, the bird will then fly at the snake and scream at it in a high-pitched tone characteristic of the road-runner; the snake will awaken and try to crawl away, but the spines of the tasajilla fence will prick his belly and he will draw back; the road-runner will continue to fly at the snake and draw back quickly all the while uttering it’s shrill cry: the snake will strike and miss and be rewarded for it’s effort by pricking it’s tender underside on the tasajilla; finally, the snake will become so en-

raged and frustrated that he will bite himself and be destroyed by his own venom.

As in much of nature, there is a lesson for man in this circumstance. All of us, even Christians, are two-fold beings. . . body and spirit, carnal and spiritual. The carnal nature of man, prompted by lust and passion, when not controlled, is filled with deadly venom much like the rattlesnake. The devil and his emissaries are well aware of this fact, hence constantly seek to arouse in the Christian this sleeping, deadly beast.

Worldly men and false brethren are often tools of Satan in his efforts to destroy God’s children. Finding they cannot seduce God’s people otherwise, they will resort to persecution, innuendo, defamation of character, and misrepresentation of many, in an effort to stir up the Christian’s carnal passion and cause him in fighting back to destroy himself with his own poison. Christians must oppose evil and false doctrine within as well as without the church, but let us take care! The devil and his emissaries are not limited as to weapons, but the Christian must not employ “carnal” weapons (II Corinthians 10:4) in his warfare.

Let us not in anger and frustration generated by this fact destroy ourselves. Let us humbly and meekly bear the onslaughts of the wicked employing only truth as our weapon in withstanding his attack. Bitterness, hate, evil-speaking, innuendo, and misrepresentation are the “carnal weapons” of the Evil One. Faith, truth, loyalty, purity, and works of faith are the armaments of Christians. With these, God can, and will, give us the victory.—*James W. Adams*

HOUSECLEANING TIME



The Origin of RELIGIOUS MISUNDERSTANDING *and* FALSE TEACHING

By JAMES E. GIBBONS

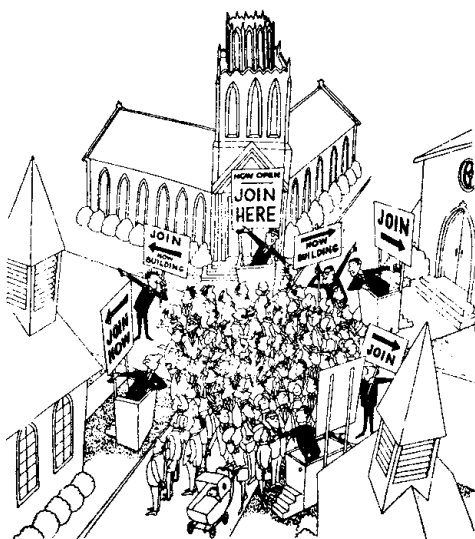
READ the New Testament Scriptures. Carefully take notice of the simple message and pattern of things. Then take an unbiased look around the religious world today. Aren't you bewildered, somewhat amazed, and even startled by what you see? Where did all these denominations, traditions, and *isms* come from? One who has spent some time with the Scriptures knows that something is amiss, and he must confess that there are many, many denominations and doctrines in divergence with the Bible. Surely this is not what the Lord prayed for in the 17th chapter of John (John 17:20-22). Surely this is not the will of the Lord who through the inspired apostle Paul stressed the *oneness* of His plan (Ephesians 4:3-6), and showed the sinfulness of division and the party spirit (I Corinthians 1:10-13; 3:3,4,17; Romans 16:17).

Just exactly what are the origins of religious misunderstanding and teachings foreign to the Word of God?

We do not claim to have all the answers, nor is our position altogether an arbitrary one. However we speak from the vantage point of one who has disassociated himself from denominationalism (of which we were very much a part) to search our souls and the Scriptures. We humbly present these observations, reflections, and suggestions.

Roman Catholicism

We are convinced that Roman Catholicism represents a primary source of misunderstanding, false teaching, and erroneous practice. The Roman Catholic Church, with her sister bodies and offspring, came into being as a direct fulfillment of inspired prophecy (II Thessalonians 2:1-8; I Timothy 4:1-3; II Timothy 4:1-4; etc.). The falling away came as an admixture of Judaism, paganism, and human philosophy with a sprinkling of Christianity. This finally crystalized into the Catholic politico-relig-



ious system (with the Eastern Church being very similar).

The Protestant Reformation was an effort to reform some of this apostasy, but Protestantism has carried over much of the teaching and mentality of Catholicism (and it seems in many circles to be headed back toward Rome today). Sprinkling for baptism, as well as infant "baptism," came out of Catholicism; also, the presumptuous use of human tradition and creeds to supplement and even replace the Holy Scriptures, the elevation of human beings and church government unheard of in early New Testament times, the artificial distinction of clergy and laity, unwarranted titles of religious leaders such as "Holy Father" and "Reverend," observance of Holy days—to name a few of the carry-over things from Catholicism.

The Protestant Reformation

The Protestant Reformation first began within the Catholic Church, but the zealous Reformers were soon compelled to leave this arrogant system. They exposed many evils of Catholicism, but (sad to say) they were greatly reactionary. In the heat of theological battle in the midst of, and on the fringe of, the Dark Ages, it was hard for them to sit back and view everything objectively. The pendulum made its

swing to the other extreme, and with time their reactionary views were crystalized and canonized into denominational creeds; hence a snare for unborn generations to perpetuate denominationalism by fostering loyalty to their respective man-made creeds.

Let us elaborate. In the Catholic Church the Reformers found God dethroned with the Pope and priests in His place. They saw men attempting to be justified by prescribed human works. Faith (in the New Testament sense) seemed to have been left out of the picture. Trying to correct such erroneous religion, the reactionary Reformers were the unintended cause of other misunderstandings which were equally wrong. Some went to the extreme in the other direction. They stressed the sovereignty of God to the point of complete predestination (Calvinistic style), with "once in grace always in grace" being the natural offshot. The favorite and most characteristic doctrine of Protestantism became "FAITH ONLY" and still is today. Martin Luther reportedly called the epistle of James an epistle of "straw" (denying it was part of the Bible) because it ran counter to his theory of "faith only" (James teaches that we are not saved by "faith only," James 2:14-26). Other reactionary teachings came later, but took more of a localized character in various denominations.

Deluded Deceivers

We call this grouping "deluded deceivers" since the Bible does mention "deceiving and being deceived." All false teaching comes as a result of deception in one way or another, but we are aptly applying this to the sects and cults of more recent times.

Men and women have "arisen" claiming the gift of inspiration or prophecy, and even claiming that angels have given them lost books of religion (Galatians 1:8). It is amazing what followings denominations oriented in this direction have today. These people usually have a fierce (but not rational) sense of loyalty to their religion and it human founder. Thus, they are overtly joined in unholy wedlock to teach-

(Continued on Next Page)

THE ORIGIN OF RELIGIOUS MIS- UNDERSTANDING AND FALSE TEACHING *(from Last Page)*

ings other than the HOLY SCRIPTURES, and arranging a separation is most difficult because of their delusion.

These people need to realize that the gift of prophecy is not in the church today (I Corinthians 13:8-10; Ephesians 3:3-5; 2:20), and the Word of God is not to be added to (Revelation 22:18). The Bible is a completed book. The man who claims the Holy Spirit tells him what to preach without studying is deluded indeed (he equates himself with an apostle or prophet, or even beyond that). Feeling without fact in religion is nothing short of delusion. After all, a man who must rely altogether on his feelings (in the everyday physical world) is a blind man and cannot see. But by the truth of God we can KNOW through faith.

Modern Liberalism

This past century saw the beginning in a large way of Modern Liberalism (this liberalism is very radical). It is a swing away from historic Christianity and the authenticity of the Bible itself in the name of "Higher Learning." The supernatural, if not denied outright, is down-graded. This school of religious thought (which has made a wide cut across most party lines of all old-line denominations) is obsessed with the theory of evolution in reference to the origin of life, and it is applied to the Bible in almost every sense (as well as to man and society in general). Naturally the inspiration of the Scriptures is not held in the usual historical sense. These pseudo-religionists want to redeem society, but not necessarily souls.

For one who accepts the Bible for what it says, these views are nothing short of rank and unvarnished infidelity. Can any thing be more radical and false than to deny our historic religion? to deny the virgin birth and miracles of Christ? His redemptive death? His bodily resurrection (and consequently our resurrection)? Modern Liberalism has a wide influence in this religious world, and most old "respectable" denominations (or

their institutions of Higher Learning, so-called) are not untouched by this pseudoism.

O Beloved! Beware of this modern unbelief. Get out of it and avoid it like the plague! (II John 9-11).

Closing

Obviously we have not covered every phase of the origin of religious misunderstanding and false teaching, but at least we have called your attention to the problem. Most people foolishly close their eyes and say there is no problem. The majority are offended if you even imply there is something or someone wrong. We are told: "Go to the church of your choice; it doesn't make any difference what you believe, just so you are sincere" (However, examine II Thessalonians 2:10-12; Galatians 1:8; I Timothy 4:16; John 8:32). Beloved, in all honesty and sincerity, this is but naive and wishful thinking (or lack of it). The wish seems to be the father of the

thought. An undesirable situation must be justified, excused, or recognized for what it is—and then corrected! Most people try to excuse and justify denominationalism.

The Lord Jesus forewarned (and may we listen): "And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold. But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved" (Matthew 24:11-13). And the apostle Paul warned and charged Timothy: "But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; and that from a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (II Timothy 3:13-15).

BELOVED, the situation in the re-

ERA OF DIRT—BEGONE!

Era of dirt, dissipation, and drugs—begone!

Too long our land has been adulterated!

Too long our youth have been captivated

By the earth-bound philosophies

Of pried pipers and false prophets!

Too long the righteous have been nauseated

And have tolerated (though exasperated)!

Our eyes burn from that which we see;

Our ears hurt from that which we hear.

Era of dirt, dissipation, and drugs—begone!

May cleansing winds of change sweep upon us

Removing such—reviving moral impetus!

Late-century, modern debris—

Bankrupt!—begone now and for good!

Neither trade we open shame for secret

Trespass in which one plays the hypocrite.

Our hearts yearn for that which we need;

Our souls desire to cry, "I'm freed!"

By A. BROTHER

ligious world today is not what the Lord Jesus wants. Would you search the Scriptures (and your own heart) for yourself to find out just exactly what is taught and what the Lord wants? A true Christian's loyalty is to Christ, not to some man-made denominational system. Let us lay aside all human names, man-made creeds and traditions of men. Yes, let us completely return to the church of the New Testament, which is not a denomination. □

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YOUTH and GOD



ONE OF THE DICTIONARY definitions of youth is "the part of life that succeeds childhood; the period usually from puberty to maturity; adolescence." This is a most important period of a person's life for the foundation is being laid for that which is to follow. It is even as the Lord Jesus taught that we should build our houses upon the rock by taking heed to His Word and not upon the sand (Matthew 7:24-27). A solemn admonition is given in Proverbs 22:6, "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old he will not depart from it." This verse is more complex than would seem on the surface. Yes, we know the "way he should go." He is to be trained in the way of the Word of God and the things of God. However, more is involved in this verse: "the way HE should go," or as the footnote says, "HIS way HE should go." In other words, the Word of God must be adapted to the child's particular personality, needs, and circumstance. Two children may be taught in the same way the same things, but respond differently. And they respond differently to correction and discipline. Wisdom is needed. This is where many of us are deficient. But we are promised success if we take heed to Proverbs 22:6. The end product can be seen in I John 3:14b as John said, "I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one."

Youth is a very dangerous period in a person's life (and especially in the kind of society in which we live today). From very early childhood to age 21 is a most dangerous road to travel, and few arrive into adulthood without some smash-ups along the way. We live in a society where morals have been thrown to the wind. Loose anti-Christian attitudes about sex, marriage, and the family abound. From music, movies, television and almost every quarter a child's mind is

bombarded, the innocence of youth is shortlived, and a child is predisposed to err. Illegal drugs are accessible on every hand (accessible as candy, we are told). Drinking and smoking are as common as everyday life. Paul admonished Timothy, "Flee youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (II Timothy 2:22). Couple the temptations with the tempted (and youthful weakness), and you have a problem. Few reach adulthood unsoiled. Many must pray with David, "Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions: according to thy mercy remember thou me for thy goodness' sake, O LORD" (Psalms 25:7). The return route of the prodigal son must be traveled (Luke 15). A lot of foolish, fool-hardy things are done. But remember, if we live it up we will have a hard time living it down. If we throw our lives away, we better watch out where they will land. A mis-spent youth breeds a loathsome old age.

Realizing the apparent need, God has provided young people with guides in the person of parents, religious leaders, and the very Word of God. Proverbs 2:17 said the "strange woman" "forsaketh the guide of her youth and forgetteth the covenant of her God." Jeremiah 3:4 states, "Wilt thou not from this time cry unto me, My father, thou art the guide of my youth?" And, true to God's plan, Proverbs 1:8 says, "My son, hear the instructions of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother." Listen to Ephesians 6:1-4, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right, Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;) That it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth. And ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." Elders are to be an example for all the flock (I Peter 5:3). I Peter 5:5a admonishes, "Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder." If we cannot learn from the experienced and seasoned lives of the older saints of God, we are bound to have to learn the hard way. The Word of God is our great source of counsel and spiritual strength. The book of Proverbs is especially good for the young person to read and heed. Yes, "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth. . ." (Ecclesiastes 12:1). □

—By James E. Gibbons

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ADVISING MICHAELANGELO

IT WAS TOLD of Michaelangelo that after completing his famous statue of David that the commissioner of that work offered his criticism. He suggested to the artist that the nose was a bit large and that it should be reduced in size. The great sculptor mounted the scaffolding once again but took with him a handful of marble dust which had fallen to the floor. He made a few harmless blows with the hammer and chisel and allowed the marble dust to fall from his hand. The critic took another look at the nose and said, "Now, that is a lot better. I believe it will be a masterpiece."

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Mystery ORGANIZATIONS VERSUS CHRIST'S BODY, *The Church*

THE PRE-CHRISTIAN GREEK RELIGIONS were mystery religions. There is a disturbing similarity between those and some of the "mystery" fraternal orders of our time.

Among the pagan Greeks, a *mystery* was a rite which was kept secret from all except the initiated. These were specially prepared to have the secrets revealed to them under the guidance of a *hierophant*, a "revealer of holy things."

One source says there were four stages of revelation: First, there was preliminary purification. Second, there was *communication of mystic knowledge*, probably including a sort of "sermon" of instruction or exhortation. Third—and this was the central part—, there was the *revelation of the holy things*. (This was something *done*, not spoken or nor merely spoken. Lucian says that all mysteries included dancing. Hence, it is usually, and reasonably, concluded that some sort of pageant or rudimentary sacred drama was shown.) Finally, there was the garlanding of the mystic, thus badging him, as it were, as a privileged person.

One can hardly miss the similarities between that and initiation rites into secret fraternal orders such as the Masonic lodge and related orders. Should a Christian be a member of such a secret order?

Christ's church is of divine origin. It is "the fulness of him that filleth all in all" (Ephesians 1:23). All of our service to God *and* man is to be to God's glory *in connection with the church*: "Unto him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all generations for ever and ever. Amen" (Ephesians 3:21, ASV). Religious and sacred mysteries belong to God! He wants "to make all men see what is the dispensation of the mystery which for ages hath been hid in God who created all things; to the intent that now unto the principalities and the powers in the heavenly places might be made known THROUGH THE CHURCH the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Ephesians 3:9-11, ASV). If one is a Christian, a member of the body of Christ, he must not seek to render service also through a different religious or quasi-religious organization.

The Christian is *complete in Christ* (Colossians 2:10). Accordingly, Christ can be our only Master. Jesus said, "Neither be ye called masters: for one is your master, even the Christ" (Matthew 23:10). Ever hear of the "Grand Master" or "Worshipful Master" in Masonry?

Although most Masons will deny it, the Masonic lodge is at heart a religious order. It has the mystery rites, worship rituals, etc., one would expect in a syncretization of pagan, Jewish and "Christian" religions. It is "an eminently religious institution" (Mackey, *Encyclopedia of Freemasonry*, p. 640), which claims to be of "divine origin" (Taylor-Hamilton

Monitor of Symbolic Masonry, p. 14). Masonry claims to be involved in the erection of a "Temple composed of living stones, a spiritual building" which offers "the hope of life eternal" (*New Age Magazine*, April 1953, p. 219). Such talk is a brazen attempt to steal language applied by the Holy Spirit to the church of *Christ*. See I Peter 2:1-10 and Ephesians 2:19-22.

Masons are told that if they wear their apron "without soil or blemish" they "will be received at the pearly gates of heaven" (*Tennessee Craftsman*, p. 60). In some of the higher degrees of Masonry, Masonic baptism and communion are observed, according to Mackey (IBID, pp. 107,487,126). Masonry has sought to borrow nomenclature and symbols and rites from the church of Christ, and while many Masons stoutly deny it, the lodge subtly holds out to its members the hope of eternal life based on the lodge's works.

—Richard Snell

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READ SLOWLY AND MEDITATE

1. Does my life please God?
2. Am I glad to be a Christian?
3. Do I shelter in my heart any feeling of hate toward anyone?
4. Do I study my Bible everyday?
5. How much time do I employ in secret prayer?
6. Have I gained some soul for Christ?
7. Have I obtained some direct answer to my prayer?
8. Do I appreciate time and eternity as things of true value?
9. Do I pray and work for the salvation of someone?
10. Do I have anything I cannot give for Christ?
11. Where am I committing my biggest mistake?
12. How do those who are not Christians see my life?
13. Do I place anything in preference to my Christian duties?
14. Do I use the Lord's money in a Christian way?
15. Am I negligent in my acknowledged debts?
16. Is the world better or worse for my living in it?
17. Am I doing anything that I would condemn in others?
18. Do I have a clear conception of my place in the Lord's work?—*Selected* □

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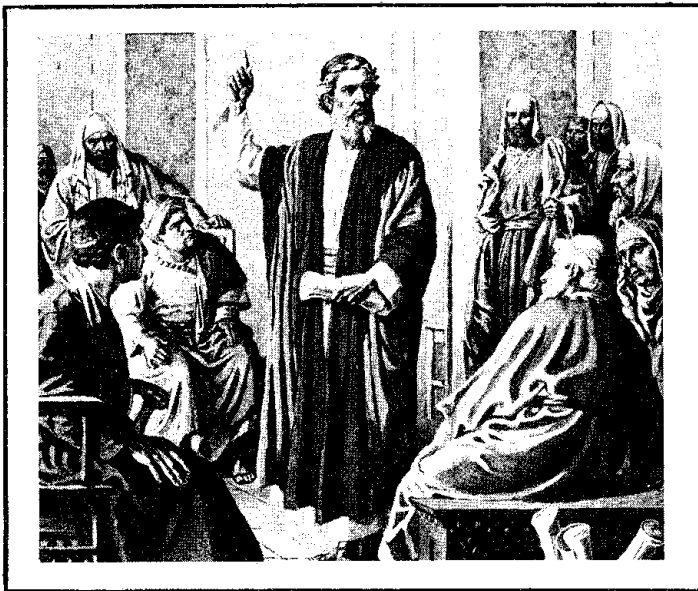
What Does "Failure" Mean to You?

ONE OF THE WORDS and subjects most people try to avoid is "failure." Failure should be our teacher, not our undertaker. It should challenge us to reach out for new heights of accomplishment, not drag us down to depths of despair.

Of course failure is delay but it need not mean defeat. We should regard it as a temporary detour, not as a dead-end street. The prophet Micah said: "When I fall, I shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the LORD shall be a light unto me" (Micah 7:8).—*Christian Newsletter* □

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The Local Church



of the First Century

By JAMES E. GIBBONS

OUR ENGLISH word "church" is commonly used to translate the Greek word *ἐκκλησία* (*ecclesia*). *ἐκκλησία* actually is a combination of two words, *ἐκ* (a preposition meaning out of) and *καλεω* (which means to call). The church is made up of people called out of a world of sin to constitute God's assembly.

The term "church" (as applied to Christians) is used in three different ways in the New Testament, having reference to (1) the church universal in the world (Matthew 16:18); (2) the church (a single congregation) in a given locality (I Corinthians 1:1,2); and (3) the local church meeting in assembly (Colossians 4:16; I Corinthians 14:33-35).

The extent of the organization of the church of the first century was local (from a local base) and autonomous. The church was not organized universally (there was no earthly head of the church and no earthly headquarters). The church was in no sense organized regionally (there were no district organizations; no missionary societies, no evangelizing boards—*do we read of the Syrian Missionary Society sending out Paul and Barnabas?*). The local unit was the extent of the organization of the church (Philippians 1:1; I Peter 5:2). There were no crystalized religious organizations beyond the local church.

The early church operated very successfully with this set-up, and we believe that it still can today (if we work under the same charter; if our aims and aspirations are the same—otherwise there may be problems). Some say we live in different times and circumstances and that the simple organization of the first century church is not practical today. But it is well for us to remember that one of the first main departures from the church in the early days was from the simplicity of its organization which climaxed in the

pope of Rome (yes, finally II Thessalonians 2:3,4). The last century movement to return to Christ's church was going fine until they formed a missionary society and began to organize (the rest of the story is denominational history). But the tragedy is that many have not learned their lesson. Yes, many give lip-service to the concept of the New Testament church and its organization, but disregard actually putting this organization into practice. They have set up other organizations to do the work that each local church did in the first century.

Do you think God would leave the work to be accomplished as outlined in the Great Commission (and enlarged upon elsewhere)—yes, this great work—, without telling us how to do it? Read John 14:26; 16:23; II Timothy 3:16,17; and II Peter 1:3 and see if you think it is reasonable to think that God would speak on this subject. God did not work through super man-made organizations in the first century (this is the wisdom of men, the power of men), but through *individuals* in relationship to His *simple set-up of the local church* (I Corinthians 1:27-31; etc.).

Therefore, let us take a closer look at the activity of the local church of the first century.

I. EVANGELISM

Yes, God accomplishes His purpose in reference to the church through individuals in relation to and as a part of the local church (and through individuals as individuals). This can be seen in evangelism.

The body of Christ, the church, is to make increase of itself through the part of every member (Ephesians 4:16). In the early days of the church "they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word" (Acts 8:4). The rank-and-file membership of the church did this. This is one reason they grew so fast. But when it came time for the church to exercise itself in a collective and organized sense (for example), it was the local church at Antioch (through the urging of God) that sent Paul and Barnabas into the fields of harvest. These men felt a strong tie with the Antioch church that prompted them to return time and again to share the good news of their work and to be recommissioned (Acts 13:1-3; 14:26-28; 15:40,41; 18:22, 23). Paul wanted Timothy to help him in the work of God (Acts 16:1-3), and the elders of the local church there in Asia Minor sent Timothy out into this great work (I Timothy 4:14; 1:18). Then at different times individual churches sent their financial backing to support the apostle Paul (Philippians 1:1-5; 2:25; 4:15-17; II Corinthians 11:8,9), not some missionary society.

They thought of no other way to get the job done. The local organization of a community of believers is all that God had called into being, and it was through this organization they functioned. It was by the church "the manifold wisdom of God" was made known (Ephesians 3:10). And, would that we be satisfied to function the same way today.

II. EDUCATION

Even as the early church was its own missionary society, it was its own educational organization and

(Continued on Next Page)

THE LOCAL CHURCH OF THE FIRST CENTURY *(Continued from Last Page)*

institution. Paul wrote to Timothy of “the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (I Timothy 3:15).

In one sense all in the church are to be teachers (Hebrews 5:12-14), yet God has vested this responsibility in a special way in the hands of certain ones who must be qualified in this respect. Besides the preachers spearheading in the matter of evangelism, he is also a teacher (Acts 20:20; Matthew 28:20). And they were to teach “faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also” (II Timothy 2:2). Elders, who must be advanced in knowledge and experience, are over the local church to teach and guide it. To the Ephesians elders Paul said, “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28). The church at Antioch was well staffed with teachers (Acts 13:1), and according to Acts 11:26 had already been in full swing.

Primary teaching was not something that only the local church did, after which those who wished to advance in knowledge and the Lord’s work were “shipped” off to someone’s Bible College. The local church was its own educational institution.

In this day of “churchettes” and “sermonettes,” in this day of church “leaders” who know little of God’s Word, in this day of Sunday School organizations with their anemic literature; yes, in such a day, what we have said may sound radical.

III. BENEVOLENCE

The early church was actively involved in benevolence. This is first mentioned very early in connection with the church in Jerusalem. They were already taking care of widows, but through an oversight some had not been helped. Seven men (thought by some to be deacons) were selected to “serve tables” in making sure everything was done properly (Acts 6). Then in the early days of the Antioch church they were involved in sending “relief” to Christians in Jerusalem in view of anticipated hard times. Luke records: “Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul” (Acts 11:30). They functioned as one local church in relation to another local church. Paul and Barnabas were used to deliver this to the elders (not to deacons) since elders are overseers over all facets of the work of the Lord’s church. And Paul was much later preoccupied with other offerings for the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem who had lost so much (read in Romans and I and II Corinthians). Over a period of time offerings were taken up in the Gentile churches, and when the time came messengers from the individual churches accompanied Paul to Jerusalem (II Corinthians 8:23; Acts 20:4; etc.)—and it seems to have been presented to the elders (Acts 21:17,18). In I Timothy instructions are given concerning a local church taking care of its destitute widows (I Timothy 5:3-16).

Yes, the church collectively was to do that which

each member was already sensitive about doing. Paul wrote in Galatians 6:10, “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.” Paul reminded the Ephesian elders, “I have showed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). All were aware of what James said: “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world” (James 1:27). They knew of John’s sentiments (I John 3:17,18).

The leadership of the local church should be on their toes in this respect and not leave such matters up to private institutions (and especially as involves their own membership).

Oh, the beauty, the love, the purity of true religion! There is nothing like it!

Conclusion

IN THE LIGHT of what we have just noticed, it is our conviction that we should, we can, and we must get what the Lord wants accomplished in reference to the church (in an organized sense) within the framework of the local church (for that is the extent of the organization found in the New Testament). Many concepts today (which have bypassed the Scriptures) must be changed. Responsibility must be faced up to and accepted. And, admittedly, a lot of “digging in” must be done. Many are going to have to start handling the Bible in more than just a surface, superficial way. Let the church be the church. It is the “pillar and ground of the truth.” □

★★★★★★

Mutual Submission

GOD HAS MADE successful relationships among people a very important part of Christianity. The principles and ideals of divinely approved human association are repeated again and again through the New Testament. One of the most unusual commandments concerning Christian thought and action is stated by the apostle Paul. He said, “and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ” (Ephesians 5:21).

Mutual submission includes our mutual concern for the rights and needs of each other, and our obligations to one another. Worldly pride leads us to demand from others what we think they owe us. Our Christian humility leads us to give to others what Christ teaches that we owe to them.

This spirit has been said to be the most characteristic of the social duties of Christians. It includes consideration of one another, and the loving service which one may be able to render the other.

—Pat Stevenson

★★★★★★

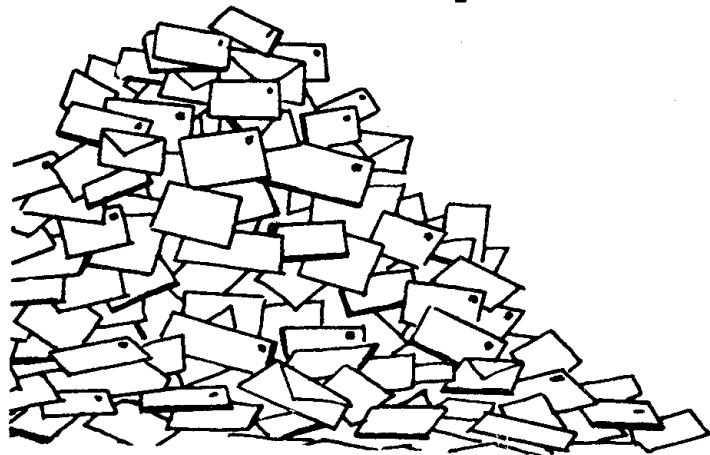
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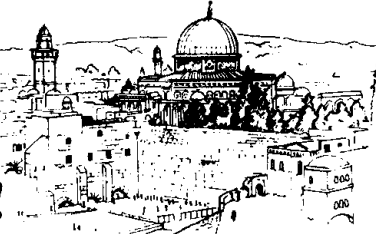
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