

G R A C E

... it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace ... Hebrews 13:9

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Studies in Galatians—Part Six John G. Reisinger

Our last study ended with Galatians 2:10. In the previous verses, Paul had been making two crucial points: (1) his full acceptance by the Jerusalem apostles, and (2) their validation of his claim that the gospel message he preached was in agreement with that which they preached. The next few verses record an open confrontation between Paul and his fellow apostle, Peter. Read carefully the report of this astounding episode.

¹¹But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. ¹²For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when

they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. ¹³And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. ¹⁴But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? ¹⁵We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, ¹⁶Knowing that a man is not

Reisinger—Cont. on page 2

As I was reading Reid Ferguson's second article on worldliness, I kept thinking about the third stanza of Edward Mote's great hymn, "On Christ the Solid Rock I Stand." "His oath, his covenant, his blood/ Support me in the whelming flood/ When all around my soul gives way/ He then is all my hope and stay." The great test of biblical godliness is maintaining an unwavering hope when the only ground of hope is the very person of God himself. Reid's article provides a good dose of the kind of truth our present-day giddy, self-centered Christians need. God is not, as presented by some modern preachers, a heavenly bellhop whose only function is to tote our suitcase of personal happiness anywhere we direct him. If Reid is right, and I for one believe he is, then some of the most worldly, self-gratifying meetings in town take place on Sunday morning at some of the local evangelical churches. JGR

Worldliness—Part 2 Gleanings from Psalm 106 Reid A. Ferguson

When Adam and Eve forgot they were made BY God, FOR God—made to reveal his glory and spread the fame of his name—they became worldly. It is the same today. When we Christians lose sight of our purpose as God has re-created us in Christ Jesus, we become worldly too. We think and live as though God exists for us. In effect, we set aside the reality of creation and the created order. Genesis 1:1 reads, "In the beginning God..." not, "in the beginning—

man." Humanity was made BY God, FOR God, to bear his image, and not he ours. In bearing his image, our purpose is to reveal him, to glorify him. Worldliness begins with an anthropocentric—a human-centered—point of view.

I grew up in the era when worldliness was defined by: "You don't drink, smoke, or chew, or go with girls who do." Movies, playing cards, dancing—these

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justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. (Gal. 2:11-16 KJV)

John Stott has captured the heart of this situation well.

This is without a doubt one of the most tense and dramatic episodes in the New Testament. Here are two leading apostles of Jesus Christ face to face in complete and open conflict.

The scene has changed from Jerusalem, the capital of Jewery, to Antioch, the chief city of Syria, even of Asia, where the Gentile mission began, and where the disciples were first called Christians. When Paul visited Jerusalem, Peter (together with James and John)

gave him the right hand of fellowship (verses 1-10). When Peter visited Antioch, Paul opposed him to the face (verses 11-16).¹

In the early part of chapter 2, we saw Paul vehemently defend the gospel of free and sovereign grace against people known as Judaizers. They were professing Christians, but in reality were “false brothers.” Paul and Barnabas had encountered these people in Antioch, debated their claim of the necessity of circumcision, and then traveled to Jerusalem to discuss the question with the elders and apostles there (Acts 15:1-2). While in Jerusalem, the Judaizers reappear, raise the issue again, and force the council to resolve the controversy.

. . . he proved that the truth of the gospel applies to sanctification as well as to justification.

These false teachers likely were insisting that Titus, a Christian Gentile (and by implication, all other Gentiles who professed faith in Christ), had to be circumcised before he could become a true child of Abraham. Paul used the situation to prove several things.

First, he publicly defeated the Judaizers in Jerusalem by insisting on, and receiving, public acceptance by the church of the uncircumcised Titus as a brother in Christ. Second, his action openly demonstrated that he, Paul, was fully accepted as a true apostle by the apostles at Jerusalem.

Second, he proved that the truth of the gospel applies to sanctification as well as to justification.

In verses 11-16, the scene changes from Jewish Jerusalem to Gentile Antioch. And the particulars of the argument change from circumcision to dietary laws. In Jerusalem, the question was theological and dealt with justification or more specifically, “Must you be circumcised in order to be saved?” In Antioch, the question was practical and dealt with sanctification or more specifically, “How does a new covenant child of God relate to the law of Moses in his or her personal life?” John Piper explains that the two questions are different sides of the same coin.

Now in 2:11-14 the “truth of the gospel” is again at stake but in a different manner. Again Gentiles are about to be compelled to live like Jews. In Jerusalem the issue was circumcision. In Antioch the issue is Jewish dietary laws. Two terms make the connection between the Titus affair and the Antioch affair explicit. First, the term “compel.” In verse 3 Paul says, “But even Titus . . . was not *compelled* to be circumcised.” And in the last part of verse 14 he says to

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1. John Stott, *Only One Way: The Message of Galatians*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1968), 49.

“Our Friend Lazarus Sleeps”

Studies on the Resurrection of Lazarus—Part 7

Philip W. McMillan, M.D.

Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha (John 11:11).

The subject of death is one that makes even the Christian uneasy. We may see someone who is injured badly or very ill, struggling and fighting as if death is visible to them and they try to fend off his cold hands. The message of the humanists in ethical theory is that death is as natural as birth, an event to be feared no more than being born. They say that in old age death is a friend, come to put an end to the pain and frustration of a failing strength. At funerals we have all heard even preachers speak of the scornful and malicious of the town now lying in a casket and say, “He is better off now than when he lived.”

Death is not a blessing, but a penalty. God said to Adam, “From the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die” (Genesis 2:17). God created Adam upright. His mind had no flaw to blind him to God’s will, his soul had a true affection for God, his body had no death sentence engraved in the template of his genes. He was not in bondage through fear of death (Hebrews 2:15), for no one had ever died.

But one day Adam ate of that tree willfully, for he was not deceived, (1 Timothy 2:14). At that instant, sin entered the world and death through sin, (Romans 5:12). In an instant, a flood of darkness entered the mind of man. Man now needed a savior, but the gospel was veiled to him for the god of this world had blinded his mind that he might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the

image of God, (2 Corinthians 4:3, 4). His mind was hostile to God, would not be subject to his law, for it could not be, (Romans 8:7).

At birth, man’s body is programmed to self-destruct, for “it was appointed to him to die once and after that to come to judgment” (Hebrews 9:27). Eden was a threefold death: of God consciousness, of the body and of the never dying soul of man.

From then on, man would gather around the cold remains of his fellow man to pay tribute, to mourn and to carry him to the graves of corruption. “In the day you eat you shall die.”

Yet, though Lazarus was dead by our definitions of death, the Lord said: “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep.” This word that our Lord used to describe his own who had died, is a word of love from God, to make us leave off staring at the skull of death and lift our eyes to the Living God “in whom we have life and breath and all things, and in whom we live, move and exist” (Acts 17:25, 28).

There was a man who came to the Lord Jesus personally, to ask help of him, because death had come to his house. He bowed and worshipped and said: “My daughter has just died, but come and lay your hand on her and she will live.” This man was a believer in Jesus who is eternal life. He believed that the man he spoke to had the keys of Hades and of death (Revelation 1:18). When they arrived at the man’s house there was a great crowd gathered to weep and wail and the Lord said to them: “Make room, for the girl is not dead, but is sleeping” (Matthew 9:24). The crowd ridiculed him “in whom was life, and the life

the light of men,” (John 1:4). Oh, but when Jesus took her by the hand, the girl arose. Her body had slept, but her soul was only resting in the person of her creator; she slept!

Once the light of the gospel shines into the heart and soul of a sinner, once they see “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 4:6)” they cannot die the death, they only sleep. In 1 Corinthians 11 the Apostle Paul rebuked the Corinthian believers for taking part in the Lord’s Table celebration unworthily. They probably had both wrong attitudes toward it and unconfessed sins. Since they hadn’t judged themselves and repented, God had judged them. Paul said they “did not discern the Lord’s body and for this reason, many were weak and sick among them and many sleep,” cf. verses 27-32. Guilty of grievous sin, yet being believers, Paul didn’t say they were dead, but “many slept.”

The reason we can grasp this blessed teaching of the Scriptures to our souls and rest in hope is that we know of yet another man who wasn’t held in the grasp of death, but slept. He is the one who said, “Our friend Lazarus is asleep.” Even now while life goes on, “We groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. For we were saved in this hope” (Romans 8:23, 24). And how were we saved? By believing, “that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3, 4).

We only sleep because the seed of life was in his real humanity. Christ
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Cephas, in Antioch, “If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you *compel* the Gentiles to live like Jews?” The other term is “the truth of the gospel.” In verse 5 Paul says, “We did not yield submission even for a moment, that *the truth of the gospel* might be preserved for you.” And in verse 14 he says, “When I saw they were not straightforward *about the truth of the gospel* ... “ So in verses 11-14 Paul teaches us that we can contradict the gospel in our life not only by requiring circumcision, but also by other kinds of ritual demands as well.²

We need to understand both what happened at Antioch and why it happened. At some point after the Jerusalem Council, Peter had come to Antioch. He had eaten freely with Christian Gentiles there (vv. 11, 12), which was consistent with his Jerusalem speech

defending Jewish and Gentile equality and salvation through grace (Acts 15:6-11). Next, some men claiming to be sent from Jerusalem by James (they were lying) had come to Antioch. This group had intimidated Peter, whose fear then caused him to withdraw from eating and fellowshiping with the Gentile Christians (v. 12). The rest of the Jewish believers in Antioch, even openhearted Barnabas, Paul’s partner, had withdrawn and joined the hypocrisy (v. 13).

The fear that controlled Peter was

Peter, in his actions, was contradicting the gospel that he had preached, defended, and, until the Judaizers from Jerusalem came, had openly practiced. Peter’s behavior was clearly contrary to the gospel of free grace.

fear of criticism. It caused him openly to contradict what inwardly he knew was true, and what he had publicly defended in Jerusalem. Paul rightly rebukes Peter to his face in front of the other believers, simply because Peter was so wrong (v. 11). Verses 14-16 record Paul’s assessment of the situation and the content of his rebuke. Peter, in his actions, was contradicting the gospel that he had preached, defended, and, until the Judaizers from Jerusalem came, had openly practiced. Peter’s behavior was clearly contrary to the gospel of free grace.

We need to note two points: (1)

This confrontation involved two of the chief apostles. These two men are so significant for the development of Christianity that nearly the entire Book of Acts is devoted to the history of their ministries. (2) Peter was denying the gospel, not in his teaching, but in his behavior. For

the rest of this article, I will follow John Stott’s outline for this section. He builds it around Peter and Paul, showing what each apostle did, why he did it, and with what result. He begins with Peter.

What did Peter do that upset Paul so deeply? Paul writes in verse 12, “Before certain men came from James, Cephas *ate with the Gentiles.*” The imperfect past tense of the verb indicates that it was his regular, ongoing practice. Phillip’s paraphrase renders it, “He ... was in the habit of eating his meals with the Gentiles.” Or, as Paul puts it in verse 14, though Cephas was a Jew, he was *living like a Gentile*. I once heard Donald Barnhouse imaginatively describe the occasion this way: Peter loved ham. He was visiting a home where the hostess

was a master at fixing ham. She gave Peter a doggy bag with a few ham sandwiches to take home. As he was walking home, he met several Judaizers who asked him what was in the bag. Peter stuttered for a moment and one of the Judaizers said, “Peter, that smells like ham,” and poor Peter threw the bag of ham sandwiches away.

Peter was a Jew. The law of Moses would have forbidden his eating with Gentiles. To remain with Barnhouse’s scenario, not only the company was taboo, but also the food was wrong. Ham was specifically on the “do not eat” list. Why would Peter openly disobey the law of Moses and not only eat with Gentiles, but eat **ham** with them? The answer is simple. Peter had learned by a personal revelation from God that he was no longer to live under the law of Moses. He had learned that he was to live under the freedom of the gospel. Luke records that lesson in Acts 10:9-16. This revelation stemmed from God’s intention and subsequent preparation of Peter to evangelize a Gentile named Cornelius at Caesarea. John Piper has caught the truth of Peter’s experience and its implications.

To prepare Peter, a Jew, to visit the home of Cornelius, a Gentile, which was forbidden by the law of Moses, God gave Peter a vision ... A sheet was lowered from heaven with all kinds of animals that the Old Testament pronounced unclean (Leviticus 11). A voice from heaven said, “Rise, Peter, kill and eat” (v. 13). But Peter responded, “No, Lord, I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.” And the voice came back, “What God has cleansed you must not call common.”

This is a tremendously important turning point for Peter, and indeed, for the mission of the church, and for world history. God was saying, “Peter, a new era of redemptive history has dawned; the Messiah has come. The sacrificial

2. John Piper, “In Sync with the Gospel: Galatians 2:11-14,” February 27, 1983. Accessed on March 31, 2007 through <http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons>. © Desiring God. Website: www.desiringgod.org. Email: mail@desiringgod.org. Toll Free: 1.888.346.4700.

THE TRUE CHURCH

Bishop J. C. Ryle, (1816-1900) Liverpool, England

I want you to belong to the one true Church: to the Church outside of which there is no salvation. I do not ask where you go on a Sunday; I only ask, "Do you belong to the one true Church?" Where is this one true Church? What is this one true Church like? What are the marks by which this one true Church may be known? You may well ask such questions. Give me your attention, and I will provide you with some answers.

1. The one true Church IS COMPOSED OF ALL BELIEVERS IN THE LORD JESUS. It is made up of all God's elect—of all converted men and women—of all true Christians. In whomsoever we can discern the election of God the Father, the sprinkling of the blood of God the Son, the sanctifying work of God the Spirit, in that person we see a member of Christ's true Church.

2. It is a Church OF WHICH ALL THE MEMBERS HAVE THE SAME MARKS. They are all born again of the Spirit; they all possess "repentance towards God, faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ," and holiness of life and conversation. They all hate sin, and they all love Christ. (They worship differently, and after various fashions; some worship with a form of prayer, and some with none; some worship kneeling, and some standing; but they all worship with one heart.) They are all led by one Spirit; they all build upon one foundation; they all draw their religion from one single book—that is the Bible. They are all joined to one great center—that is Jesus Christ. They all even now can say with one heart, "Hallelujah;" and they can all respond with one heart and voice, "Amen and Amen."

3. It is a Church WHICH IS DEPENDENT UPON NO MINISTERS UPON EARTH, however much it values those who preach the gospel to its members. The life of its members does not hang upon Church-membership, or baptism, or the Lord's Supper—although they highly value these things when they are to be had. But it has only one Great Head—one Shepherd, one chief Bishop—and that is Jesus Christ. He alone, by his spirit, admits the members of this Church, though ministers may show the door. Till he opens the door no man on earth can open it—neither bishops, nor presbyters, nor convocations, nor synods. Once a man repents and believes the gospel, at that moment he becomes a member of this Church. Like the penitent thief, he may have no opportunity of being baptized; but he has that which is far better than any water-baptism—the baptism of the Spirit. He may not be able to receive the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper; but he eats Christ's body and drinks Christ's blood by faith every day he lives, and no minister on earth can prevent him. He may be ex-communicated by ordained men, and cut off from the outward ordinances of the professing Church; but all the ordained men in the world cannot shut him out of the true Church. It is a Church whose existence does not depend on forms, ceremonies, cathedrals, churches, chapels, pulpits, fonts, vestments, organs, endowments, money, kings, governments, magistrates or any act of favor whatsoever from the hand of man. It has often lived on and continued when all these things have been taken from it. It has often been driven into the wilderness, or into dens and caves of the earth, by those who ought to have

been its friends. Its existence depends on nothing but the presence of Christ and his spirit; and they being ever with it, the Church cannot die.

4. This is the Church TO WHICH THE SCRIPTURAL TITLES OF PRESENT HONOR AND PRIVILEGE, AND THE PROMISES OF FUTURE GLORY ESPECIALLY BELONG; this is the body of Christ; this is the flock of Christ; this is the household of faith and the family of God; this is God's building, God's foundation, and the temple of the Holy Ghost. This is the Church of the first-born, whose names are written in heaven; this is the royal priesthood, the chosen generation, the peculiar people, the purchased possession, the habitation of God, the light of the world, the salt and the wheat of the earth; this is the "Holy Catholic Church" of the Apostles' Creed; this is the "One Catholic and Apostolic Church" of the Nicene Creed; this is that Church to which the Lord Jesus promises "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it," and to which He says, "I am with you always, even unto the end of the world"(Matt.16:18; 28:2).

5. This is the only Church WHICH POSSESSES TRUE UNITY. Its members are entirely agreed on all the weightier matters of religion, for they are all taught by one Spirit. About God, and Christ, and the Spirit, and sin, and their own hearts, and faith, and repentance, and necessity of holiness, and the value of the Bible, and the importance of prayer, and the resurrection, and judgment to come—about all these points they are of one mind. Take three or four of them,

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and ceremonial laws of the Old Testament have done their preparatory work; let them go (cf. Mark 7:19). I will show you something great at the house of Cornelius.” So when Peter is called for, he goes—to the house of a Gentile! Verse 28 shows how he understood the vision in relation to Cornelius. He says to the Gentiles there, “You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation; but God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean.” *That doesn’t mean that men aren’t sinners. It means that nothing in a Gentile should keep a Jew from being with him to seek his salvation. So Peter preached the gospel to them, and as he was preaching, the Holy Spirit fell upon them. And it utterly astonished the Jews that uncircumcised Gentiles who kept none of their ceremonial laws could receive the Holy Spirit simply by hearing the gospel with faith.*³

Peter was so rattled by the Judaizers in Antioch that he seems to have forgotten that incident. It is not as though this was the first time he encountered opposition to his eating with Gentiles. Luke records early criticism from the circumcision party, “So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party [cf. Galatians 2:12!] criticized him, saying, ‘Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?’” (Acts 11:2, 3). Peter gave a thoroughly New Covenant answer. This defense comes to a climax in Acts 11:17. After recounting the vision and the evidence of the Holy Spirit in the believing Gentiles, he says (v. 17), “If then God gave the same gift to them *as he gave to us when we believed* in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?” This was a life-changing experience for Peter. He evidently inferred from it that not only did Gentiles not have to keep the Old Testament law of circumcision or the Old Testament ceremonial laws in order to have the same spiritual blessings as Christian Jews, but also (rightly) that he as a Jew was free from those same

laws. Slowly but surely, Peter and Paul had been moving independently by revelation to the same understanding of the truth of the gospel. The condition for receiving the Holy Spirit and enjoying all his benefits is a living faith in Jesus Christ (cf. Galatians 3:2). That is all. That is the truth of the gospel, and therefore, when Peter ate with Gentile brothers and sisters in Antioch, he was in harmony with the gospel. He was standing fast in *freedom*, honoring the all-sufficiency of Christ by *faith*, and walking in *love*.

The condition for receiving the Holy Spirit and enjoying all his benefits is a living faith in Jesus Christ. That is all. That is the truth of the gospel,

Paul’s logic in refuting Peter is itself irrefutable. Peter had stopped living like a Jew when he understood that he was longer under the law of Moses. He visited and ate with Gentile believers. He ate, with thanksgiving and a conscience void of offense, foods on the unclean list under the Old Covenant. How could anyone who acted like a Gentile, as Peter did, *and especially when he was conscious of why he was doing it*, turn around and demand that a Gentile start acting like a Jew? It was indeed hypocritical of Peter to demand that a Gentile act like a Jew when Peter himself had quit acting like a Jew and was acting like a Gentile.

The next question is, “**Why did Peter do what he did?**” The answer is simple. Peter is a person with feet of clay, just as you and I are. He acted out of fear of criticism, which stems from fear of other people. His behavior is understandable, but inexcusable.

That is why Paul is so upset. We can understand his denying Christ before the maid by the fire. The circumstances there were different from those surrounding this incident. Then, Peter feared for his life. In addition, the former denial occurred before the revelation with the sheet from heaven. The Peter who had refused to “withstand God” ate with Cornelius at Caesarea; he now “withstands God” by refusing to eat with the Gentile Christians in Antioch.

Paul’s charge is serious. He charges Peter and the others with acting in insincerity (the word means “hypocrisy”) and not from personal conviction. Their withdrawal from table-fellowship with the Gentile believers was not prompted by any theological principle, but by craven fear of a small pressure group. In fact, Peter did in Antioch precisely what Paul refused to do in Jerusalem, namely, yield to pressure. The same Peter who denied his Lord for fear of a maidservant now denied him again for fear of the circumcision party. He still believed the gospel, but he failed to practice it. His conduct did not “square with it” (NEB). He contradicted it by his action, because he lacked the courage of his convictions.

What would have happened as a result of Peter’s action if Paul had not openly rebuked him? Everything that was settled at the Jerusalem council would have been undone. There would have been two churches, one Jewish and one Gentile, and there would have been two gospels. One would declare the all sufficiency of Christ’s free and sovereign grace plus nothing in order to be saved. The other gospel, which is not a gospel at all, would be, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ **and keep the law of Moses** and you will be saved.” At best, there would be one church but two Lord’s tables.

3. Ibid, emphasis in the original.

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was sown as the seed of a reaping of men, in numbers like the stars in the heavens and as the sands on the seashore for multitude. He is the first fruits of all who rise from the dead, for in the tomb he was “the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Corinthians 15:20). Sinless, his body saw no corruption (Acts 13:37), yet he was “sown in dishonor,” because “he made his grave with the rich and the wicked at his death” (Isaiah 53:9).

Sown in dishonor, he was raised in glory. Sown in weakness of flesh, he was raised in power. Sown a natural body, raised a spiritual body, (1 Corinthians 15:42-44). This last Adam arose as the life-giving spirit of the seed, (1 Corinthians 15:45). Because of this, those who bore the image of the man of dust will bear the image of the heavenly man, (15:49).

Scripture is replete with references of this eternal life which follows our short “sleep.” “If by the one man’s offense death reigned through one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ. Therefore, as through one man’s offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one man’s righteous act, the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life” (Romans 5:17, 18).

The gospel of God “concerns his son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son

of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection of the dead” (Romans 1:3, 4).

The only way for death to become a mere closing of the eyes in sleep is “to know him and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death, if by any means, we may attain to the resurrection of the dead (sleeping)” (Philippians 3:10, 11).

One morning 2,000 years ago a great earthquake occurred and an angel rolled back the great stone at the door of a tomb where the God-Man had slept for three days and nights. It was the signal that the acceptable sacrifice had been offered and God was satisfied. The two Marys and Salome came to embalm the body of their master, but found his tomb empty. Later he told the eleven disciples that all authority was his in heaven and earth, see Matthew 28:1-18. “He had been given authority to give eternal life to as many as God had given him” John 17:2.

And “if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over him. For the death that he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life that he lives, he lives to God” (Romans 6:8-10).

We have set out from the shore of death in the good ship Faith, which is the ground of our hope. We have the charts of the Master Mariner who made this trip alone and charted the safe course for all who would follow

after. He crossed the Sea of Mortality, subjected to trials and storms of troubles which we would have never survived and he safely reached the shores of Life. “All the promises of God in him are yes, and in him Amen, to the glory of God through us,” (2 Corinthians 1:20). “This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the presence behind the veil, where the forerunner has entered for us, even Jesus, having become High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek” (Hebrews 6:19, 20). We may fear in the storms, but when we see our anchor’s rope rise and rise and rise into the nail scarred hands of him who sits on the throne, we know we are safe though reefs may threaten and winds alarm us. “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful” (Hebrews 10:23).

It is a fearful journey, and he feared it too: “In the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to him who was able to save him from death, and was heard because of his godly fear, though he was a son, yet he learned obedience by the things which he suffered. And having been perfected, he became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey him” (Hebrews 5:7-9).

But he lives and we are saved by his life: “In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor

McMillan—Cont. on page 9

The resurrection and the judgment will demonstrate before all worlds who won and who lost. We can wait.

A.W. Tozer

Ferguson—Cont. from page 1

were the virtual benchmarks of being worldly. Dare I mention the forbidden pleasures of Sen-sen? That dates me, I know. But even after all these years, I have yet to discover what possible Christian scandal could be found in a breath-freshener, except that it seemed to be the cover-up of choice among secret smokers. I distinctly remember (this is a true story) adult conversations on whether or not open-toed shoes (and sling-backs for that matter) were too risqué for Christian women to wear.

We find more contemporary worldliness standards in arguments and opinions over R-rated movies versus G only, worship music styles, women's make up, TV, internet access, King James Version only, the necessity of home-schooling—and a host of others.

Do not get me wrong. These, and a thousand other examples may well serve as symptoms of worldliness in someone—but they are NOT worldliness itself. That is something deeper. Worldliness has to do with the attitudes of the heart and the mind. We saw its first sign in Psalm 106:7. We discussed this in our last issue and reiterated it above. Worldliness is a lack of understanding the purpose of our salvation.

The second indicator in our text of a worldly heart and mind grows out of the first, and is best seen in verses 9-12 of this psalm: “He rebuked the Red Sea, and it became dry, and he led them through the deep as through a desert. So he saved them from the hand of the foe and redeemed them from the power of the enemy. And the waters covered their adversaries; not one of them was left. Then they believed his words; they sang his praise” (ESV).

The subtlety of verse 12 makes it easy for us to miss the problem. Note carefully when Israel sang God's

praise. When did they believe his words? Only when they witnessed his miracles. In other words, they revealed their worldly mindset in praise that centered upon God's works, without reference to his person.

In like fashion, we can see that a worldly mindset has begun to spring up in our own hearts when we base our praise of God solely upon his works, and do not include his person. When our worship centers on only what God has done and ignores the glory of who and what he is, we are becoming worldly.

At first glance, this is not obvious. But its danger hides in its subtlety. It rests in making a direct link between a perception of God's performance, and God's right to be believed and worshipped. Do you see it? They “believed his words” and “sang his praise” only *after* he delivered them miraculously.

No doubt, someone is immediately going to point out that it is RIGHT to praise God for his works. What else were they supposed to do? What else are WE supposed to do? And I will give you no argument on that whatsoever. The issue here is not the appropriateness of responding to God's great works. That is a given. The issue here is the danger of making a direct connection, a one-for-one correspondence that links willingness to believe God's words and worship him with perception of his beneficent acts. The problem is the worldly mindset of pragmatism: an oh-so-easily-swallowed view that in the end undermines the very nature of true biblical faith.

Pragmatism as a philosophy holds great sway in our generation. Reduced to its essence, it simply says that what works, is good. Wikipedia's article on Pragmatism states: “Most of the thinkers who describe themselves as *pragmatists* consider practical consequences or real effects to be vital components of both meaning and truth.”

Look at that statement very closely: “meaning and truth” are defined by “practical consequences or real effects.” When that wends its way into our relationship and interaction with God, it is deadly. It looks exactly like our text.

In order to get a handle on this, we will move the scene from the ancient Israelites to you and me today.

Meet Joe Christian. He has believed the gospel. He has trusted Christ's atoning sacrifice at Calvary as God's means of dealing with his sin problem. Now he goes about the business of building and deepening his relationship with his wonderful Lord and Savior. Naturally, prayer becomes a vital aspect of his new spiritual life in Christ. But Joe's marriage is beginning to sour. His unsaved spouse grows more and more restless with his newfound faith. The tension between them grows and worsens. Joe commits himself to praying this situation through. He fasts. He enlists the aid of others, both in counsel and in prayer. He believes it is God's will to heal his marriage, and to bring his wife to the saving knowledge of Christ. But eventually she leaves Joe. She walks out, files for divorce, finds someone new, and remarries. Joe is devastated. More than that, he is now at a crossroads—most likely a subconscious one, but a very real one nonetheless. He finds himself less and less inclined to worship. He will not come right out and say it—he knows enough to know it is theologically wrong—but he feels as though God has let him down. He has given his life to Christ. He will not and cannot go back. Once you have seen something, you cannot “unsee” it. But he's hurt. And lonely. Confused. He continues to be plugged into his local church. He loves the people and they sympathize with his pain. But he is still so all alone. And worship fails to flow as it once did. Disillusionment sets in. Can he really

Ferguson—Cont. on page 12

McMillin—Cont. from page 7

principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, not height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:37-39).

Many have gone before us to a better place and their bodies are asleep; only Enoch walked there with God and Elijah rode there in a chariot of fire. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob dwelt in tents, but found a city whose builder and maker is God, a heavenly country. Ruth the Moabitess is there, Moses the meekest of men, David the sweet Psalmist of Israel has a mansion there. Calvin, John Gill, Spurgeon, Fanny Crosby and some of our loved ones are there. Their bodies sleep, but “He is not the God of the dead, but of the living” (Mark 12:27).

“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:1, 2). “For since by man came death, by man also came the resurrection of the dead” (1 Corinthians 15:21).

Christ told the thief who died next to him: “This day you will be with me in Paradise,” (Luke 23:43).

What is the hope of the saint of God? To stand before the Savior as a glorified soul in a glorified body when the fullness of redemption is revealed. “I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say

to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words!” (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

We have an appointment with the rider on the pale horse, cf. Revelation 6:8, but praise be to our God, we have a meeting with the triumphant one when he descends with a shout to gather up his jewels.

They shall be Mine, says the Lord of hosts.

On that day that I make them My jewels.

And I will spare them

As a man spares his own son who serves him.

Then you shall again discern

Between the righteous and the wicked,

Between one who serves God

And one who does not serve Him, Malachi 3:17, 18.

“He who testifies to these things says, surely I am coming quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus! The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen” (Revelation 22:20, 21).

“Praise him from whom all blessings flow.”Ω

You are a hiding place for me.
Psalm 32:7

Hail, sovereign love, that first began
The scheme to rescue fallen man!
Hail, matchless, free, eternal grace,
That gave my soul a hiding-place!

[Against the God who rules the sky
I fought with hand uplifted high;
Despised the mention of his grace,
Too proud to see a hiding-place.

But thus the eternal counsel ran:
“Almighty love, arrest that man!”
I felt the arrows of distress,
And found I had no hiding-place.

Indignant Justice stood in view;
To Sinai’s fiery mount I flew;
But Justice cried, with frowning face,
“This mountain is no hiding-place!”

Ere long a heavenly voice I heard,
And Mercy’s angel-form appeared;
She led me on, with placid pace,
To Jesus, as my Hiding-place.]

Should storms of seven-fold
thunder roll,
And shake the globe from pole to pole,
No flaming bolt could daunt my face,
For Jesus is my Hiding-place.

On him almighty vengeance fell,
That must have sunk a world to hell;
He bore it for a chosen race,
And thus became their Hiding-place.

A few more rolling suns, at most,
Will land me on fair Canaan’s coast,
Where I shall sing the song of grace,
And see my glorious Hiding-place.

Selection 134 from *Gadsby’s Hymns*
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trust God with everything? It was easy to worship and rejoice before all of this. Now, it's not the same. If only God had intervened, oh how he could rejoice in his God, as at the beginning.

Do you identify with Joe at all? I do. And do you know what Joe needs at a moment like this? What you and I need in places like this? A faith, and thus worship, rooted more in the perfect, transcendent, glorious character of our God, than one resting only on what we perceive as his good acts on our behalf. When the outward circumstances do not seem to accord with success, as we would like it, we need a vision of a God who cannot fail. Our contentment, joy, and worship must come from a heart anchored in truth about God AS God, and not merely filtered through our analysis of his acts. In the words of Walter C. Smith's (1824-1908) glorious hymn, we need a renewed and steadfast vision of the:

Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
In light inaccessible hid from our eyes,
Most blessed, most glorious, the
Ancient of Days,
Almighty, victorious, Thy great Name
we praise.

Unresting, unhasting, and silent as
light,
Nor wanting, nor wasting, Thou rulest
in might;
Thy justice, like mountains, high soaring
above
Thy clouds, which are fountains of
goodness and love.

To all, life Thou givest, to both
great and small;
In all life Thou livest, the true life of
all;
We blossom and flourish as leaves on
the tree,
And wither and perish—but naught
changeth Thee.

Great Father of glory, pure Father
of light,
Thine angels adore Thee, all veiling
their sight;
But of all Thy rich graces this grace,
Lord, impart

Take the veil from our faces, the vile
from our heart.

All laud we would render; O help
us to see
'Tis only the splendor of light hideth
Thee,
And so let Thy glory, Almighty, impart,
Through Christ in His story, Thy Christ
to the heart.

Do you see how profound the difference is? Do you see how the praise rendered here is founded more on the bless—or, rather than the blessings? Yes, we are to extol God for his blessings in all of his acts and wrought wonders. One cannot read an account such as the healing of the ten lepers in Luke 12 and not be struck with the fact that often we are a very thankless lot. We correctly see that often our thanksgiving to God is pitifully lacking. Thanksgiving is a right component of worship. But it does not rise to the level of what ought to be the stunned amazement that assigns “worth” to God AS God. THAT, dear friend, is worship. Anything less fails. One cannot have a coin of any value unless it possesses both heads and tails. This is true even in human relationships. If we love our parents or spouses only for what they do for us, and not for who they are, our love is sorely lacking. So it is with our love for and worship of the living God. An unbalanced worship, standing only on the one leg of God's works, will not sustain us when we cannot understand those works—when he meets us with hardship, heartache, trial, tragedy, and inexplicable sorrow. Ask Job.

But we need to take this one step further. Worldly pragmatism not only robs God of the worship of his person, it also undermines true faith. Perhaps we can cite no more poignant example than to point to some of the wreckage that has emerged from the Word of Faith movement in our own day. This movement sees God as bound to give Christians whatever they desire, without ever analyzing the validity of

those desires. It then evaluates faith by virtue of how God performs in making good on those requests. We see it most clearly in a movement such as this; however, this is not the only place where that worldly mentality exists. Not by a long shot. Again, it is subtle but profound.

In short, the phenomenon occurs when we believe God for, or have faith for, something God has never promised. How many good Christian parents over the years have read and “claimed” Proverbs 22:6 as an absolute promise? “Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.” How many then, in the aftermath of raising a child as best they can, in the church, only to have that child walk away from the faith, find themselves in a crisis of faith?

This example demonstrates the root issue that sometimes we fail to understand the various ways in which God's Word communicates. There are indeed inviolable promises upon which we can rest our souls with absolute unwavering trust. God will, he CANNOT fail to, keep them. Passages such as Philippians 1:6, “And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ”; and Matthew 28:20b, “And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age”; or John 14:2-3, “In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also” immediately come to mind. These are steadfast absolutes. However, passages such as Proverbs 22:6 have to be read not as absolutes, but as the Wisdom literature they are. They indicate God's tendency, the normal course of things—but we dare not make them

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Miscellaneous Musings

John G. Reisinger

Some Musing about Creeds

Creeds are like guardrails along the highway. They are not the highway itself, but they help keep us on the highway. Our spiritual ancestors who developed our creeds were not infallible, and we dare not accept what they wrote without checking it against Scripture. However, when someone thinks that God has taught him something that no other person has ever seen, that person should realize he has jumped the guardrails and needs very clear Scripture to prove his position. We should revere, but not worship, our forefathers in the faith. We must see creeds as what the church **has** believed yesterday and not necessarily look at it as what the church **must** believe today.

We can also liken creeds to the lava that comes out a volcano. When the volcano is hot, the lava is soft and flows. When the volcano cools off, the lava becomes hard and brittle. When the church is alive in the Spirit, and the creed expresses her life and spiritual vitality, then creeds are helpful. When the fire goes out, then the creed becomes cold and hard, and used in ways God never intended. In the first case, the creed is a most useful tool; but in the second case, the creed is a curse to humanity and an abomination to God. The answer

to this problem, however, is not to despise the creed, but to revive the church.

Several years ago, I decided that every year, I would read some books that were not entirely theological in their content. One of those first books had the following to say about creeds.

In the *autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, there appears a remarkable quotation attributed to Michael Welfare, one of the founders of a religious sect known as the Dunkers and a longtime acquaintance of Franklin. The statement had its origin in Welfare's complaint that zealots of other religious persuasions were spreading lies about the Dunkers, accusing them of abominable principles to which, in fact, they were utter strangers. Franklin suggested that such abuse might be diminished if the Dunkers published the articles of their belief and the rules of their discipline. Welfare replied that this course of action had been discussed among his co-religionists but had been rejected. He then explained their reasoning in the following words:

When we were first drawn together as a society, it had pleased God to enlighten our minds as far as to see that some doctrines, which we once esteemed as truth, were errors, and that others, which we had esteemed as errors, were real truths. From time

to time He has been pleased to afford us farther light, and our principles have been improving, and our errors diminishing. Now we are not sure that we have arrived at the end of that progression, and at the perfection of spiritual or theological knowledge; and we fear that, if we should feel ourselves as bound and confined by it, and perhaps be unwilling to receive further improvement, and our successors still more so, as conceiving what we their elders and founders had done, to be somewhat sacred, never to be departed from.¹

Franklin describes this sentiment as a singular instance in the history of mankind of modesty in a sect. Modesty is certainly the word for it, but the statement is extraordinary for other reasons, too. We have here a criticism of the epistemology of the written word worthy of Plato. Moses himself might be interested although he could hardly approve. The Dunkers came close here to formulating a commandment about religious discourse: Thou shalt not write down thy principles, still less print them, lest thou shalt be entrapped by them for all time.

From: Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, (NY: Penguin Books, 1986), 30, 31.

¹ Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*. New York: Magnum Books, 1968. p 175.

**I put the Scriptures above all the sayings of the fathers, angels, men and devils. Here I take my stand.
Martin Luther**

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into absolutes. If we do, we run the risk of undermining our own faith.

The danger of misunderstanding context and literary form in the Bible is that when God does not “perform” as we expected, we make him suspect. We begin to doubt the true and absolute promises. Just as the Israelites in our text, we fail to lean upon God’s character—his holy nature. We have weighed him on the balances of our scales—our artificially constructed standard of performance, according to our expectations. And having done so, we have judged him wanting, though nothing could be further from the case.

Beloved, do we not see the world judging God in this way on every hand? Do you recall the spate of articles in papers and magazines, and the discussions on the talk shows about “where was God?” when the tsunami of December 24, 2004 devastated so much of Southern Asia and East Africa? People everywhere were judging God according to the standard they had set for him in their own hearts and minds—standards based solely on a level of performance they desired or expected to see. We observed the same thing again in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center buildings on September 11, 2001. If our worship is rocked by such events—if we only believe God’s words and sing his praise when we like what he has done—worldliness has crept in. Silently, but deadly.

You see, the world places no value on the human beyond his or her pragmatic value—what he or she can concretely contribute to society. This is why so many people have a crisis of identity when they retire—what value do they have if they cannot produce anything? We evaluate the severely ill according to “quality of life,” a cultural code word for useless. Infanticide is less egregious because they are not

“viable”—not merely because they cannot live independently outside the womb, but because they in effect are a draw on society’s resources. Thus, discussions surrounding abortion inevitably end up being discussions about how we (as a society) can afford to provide for all of these unwanted children. They do not have value in themselves. They cannot contribute. Their very existence then is in question.

Subtly then, we bring that very mindset to God. If he does not DO for me, how much value can I ascribe to him? The most frequent unspoken but assumed answer is—little. This is backwards thinking. God gives human life intrinsic value by making it in his image (James 3:9). He values us, not for our contributions, but according to his free love. This is diametrically opposed to a worldly mindset. All too often, we fail to bring this view back to God in kind. We do not set our love upon him nearly as freely as he sets his upon us. Our sin-sick souls do not perceive his value nakedly in who and what he is. We relate to him only through our perceptions of his performance. We believe his words (or take them less seriously) and praise him (more or less) based upon what he has done for us, without regard to his inefably glorious person.

Having said all of the above, we need to ask ourselves a searching question: is our worship (and our tendency to worship) dependent solely upon how we perceive that God has acted on our behalf all the time? Or do we meditate upon his divine perfections, astounding attributes, and transcendent nature, and thus adopt worship that flows out of the revelation of his person in and by Jesus Christ?

When worship in our churches as well as in our private lives ceases to draw our hearts and minds to awe at the majesty, power and wonder of the eternal, triune God, and dwells more on how good I think he has been to me, without regard for how good he

is in essence, I am doing what any worldly creature can do. What, in fact, many worldly creatures do, do. Thus I fail to be one who worships the Father in “spirit and in truth” (John 4:23), those whom Jesus told us the Father seeks.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon, often referred to as the “Prince of the Victorian preachers” put it this way in a sermon in 1891:

It is no idle occupation thus to get alone, and in your own hearts to magnify the Lord; to make him great to your mind, to your affections; great in your memory, great in your expectations. It is one of the grandest exercises of the renewed nature. You need not, at such a time, think of the deep questions of Scripture, and may leave the abstruse doctrines to wiser heads, if you will; but if your very soul is bent on making God great to your own apprehension, you will be spending time in one of the most profitable ways possible to a child of God. Depend upon it, there are countless holy influences which flow from the habitual maintenance of great thoughts of God, as there are incalculable mischiefs which flow from our small thoughts of him. The root of false theology is belittling God; and the essence of true divinity is greatening God, magnifying him, and enlarging our conceptions of his majesty and his glory to the utmost degree.¹

If we ground our worship mainly in God’s performance as we perceive it, we make worship dependent upon our subjective experience, and not upon the objective wonder and glory of his true and essential person. We end up valuing him only for what he does, and not for who and what he is. We become worldly in our hearts and minds.

More next time.

1. Charles H. Spurgeon, *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, Vol. 37, sermon 2219, page 445.

Ryle—Cont. from page 5

strangers to one another, from the remotest corners of the earth; examine them separately on these points: you will find them all one judgment.

6. This is the only Church WHICH POSSESSES TRUE SANCTITY. Its members are all holy. They are not merely holy by profession, holy in name, and holy in the judgment of charity; they are all holy in act, and deed, and reality, and life, and truth. They are all more or less conformed to the image of Jesus Christ. No unholy man belongs to this Church.

7. This is the only Church WHICH IS TRULY CATHOLIC. It is not the Church of any one nation or people; its members are to be found in every part of the world where the gospel is received and believed. It is not confined within the limits of any one country, or pent up within the pale of any particular forms of outward government. In it there is no difference between Jew and Greek, black man and white, Episcopalian and Presbyterian - but faith in Christ is all. Its members will be gathered from north, and south, and east, and west, and will be of every name and tongue—but all one in Jesus Christ.

8. This is the only Church WHICH IS TRULY APOSTOLIC. It is built on the foundation laid by the Apostles, and holds the doctrines which they preached. The two grand objects at which its members aim are apostolic faith and apostolic practice; and they consider the man who talks of following the Apostles without possessing these two things to be no better than sounding brass and tinkling cymbal.

9. This is the only Church WHICH IS CERTAIN TO ENDURE UNTO THE END. Nothing can altogether overthrow and destroy it. Its members may be persecuted, oppressed, imprisoned, beaten, beheaded, burned; but the true Church is never altogether extinguished; it rises again from its

afflictions; it lives on through fire and water. When crushed in one land it springs up in another. The Pharaohs, the Herods, the Neros, the Bloody Marys, have labored in vain to put down this Church; they slay their thousands, and then pass away and go to their own place. The true Church outlives them all, and sees them buried each in his turn. It is an anvil that has broken many a hammer in this world, and will break many a hammer still; it is a bush which is often burning, and yet it's not consumed.

10. This is the only Church OF WHICH NO ONE MEMBER CAN PERISH. Once enrolled in the lists of this Church, sinners are safe for eternity; they are never cast away. The election of God the Father, the continual intercession of God the Son, the daily renewing and sanctifying power of God the Holy Ghost, surround and fence them in like a garden enclosed. Not one bone of Christ's mystical body shall ever be broken; not one lamb of Christ's flock shall ever be plucked out of his hand.

11. This is the Church WHICH DOES THE WORK OF CHRIST UPON EARTH. Its members are a little flock, and few in numbers, compared with the children of the world; one or two here, and two or three there—a few in this place and few in that. But these are they who shake the universe; these are they who change the fortunes of kingdoms by their prayers; these are they who are the active workers for spreading the knowledge of pure religion and undefiled; these are the life-blood of a country, the shield, the defense, the stay, and the support of any nation to which they belong.

12. This is the Church WHICH SHALL BE TRULY GLORIOUS AT THE END. When all earthly glory is passed away then shall this Church be presented without spot before God the Father's throne. Thrones, principalities, and powers upon earth shall come

to nothing; dignities, and offices, and endowments shall all pass away; but the Church of the first-born shall shine as the stars at the last, and be presented with joy before the Father's throne, in the day of Christ's appearing. When the Lord's jewels are made up, and manifestation of the sons of God takes place, Episcopacy, and Presbyterianism, and Congregationalism will not be mentioned; one Church only will be named, and that is the Church of the elect.

13. Reader, THIS IS THE TRUE CHURCH TO WHICH ONE MUST BELONG, IF HE WOULD BE SAVED. Till you belong to this, you are nothing better than a lost soul. You may have the form, the husk, the skin, and the shell of religion, but you have not got the substance and the life. Yes, you may have countless outward privileges; you may enjoy great light, and knowledge—but if you do not belong to the Body of Christ, your light and knowledge and privileges will not save your soul. Alas, for the ignorance that prevails on this point! Men fancy if they join this church or that church, and become communicants, and go through certain forms, that all must be right in their souls. It is an utter delusion, it is a gross mistake. All were not Israel who were called Israel, and all are not members of Christ's Body who profess themselves Christian. TAKE NOTICE; you may be a staunch Episcopalian, or Presbyterian, or Independent, or Baptist, or Wesleyan, or Plymouth Brother—and yet not belong to the true Church. And if you do not, it will be better at last if you had never been born. Ω

Reisinger—Cont. from page 6

Now look at what Paul did. We cannot describe his action any better than John Stott has done.

Verse 11: Paul ‘withstood’ (NKJV) or ‘opposed’ (RSV) Peter ‘to his face’. The reason for Paul’s drastic action was that Peter ‘stood condemned’. That is to say, ‘he was clearly in the wrong’ (NEB). Not only so, but Paul rebuked Peter ‘before them all’ (verse 14), openly and publicly.

Paul did not hesitate out of deference for who Peter was. He recognized Peter as an apostle of Jesus Christ, who indeed had been appointed before him (1:17). He knew that Peter was one of the ‘pillars’ of the church (verse 9), to whom God had entrusted the gospel to the circumcision (verse 7). Paul neither denied nor forgot these things. Nevertheless, this did not stop him from contradicting and opposing Peter. Nor did he shrink from doing it publicly. He did not listen to those who may well have counseled him to be cautious and to avoid washing dirty theological linen in public. He made no attempt to hush the dispute up or arrange (as we might) for a private discussion from which the public or the press were excluded. The consultation at Jerusalem had been private (verse 2) but the showdown in Antioch must be public. Peter’s withdrawal from the Gentile believers had caused a public scandal; he had to be opposed in public too. So Paul’s opposition to Peter was both ‘to his face’ (verse 11) and before them all (verse 14). It was just the kind of open head-on collision which the church would seek at any price to avoid today.⁴

The next question is, **“Why did Paul do what he did?”** What made Paul publicly contradict and rebuke a fellow-apostle? Was Paul just a nit-picker looking for an excuse to make himself look important? Was Paul jealous of Peter and desirous of taking down a famous apostle? Did he have an uncontrollable temper and just could not keep his mouth shut? Was

Paul really just a negative personality spoiling for a fight? I am sure none of these things describe Paul’s actions or motives. I believe Paul not only loved the gospel, he also loved Peter. Paul acted in true love. This is the kind of love of which our society knows little. In a postmodern culture, everyone is right and no one is wrong. The only sin worthy of condemnation is to criticize another person for being wrong.

When anyone says, “Our church shows real love,” I always ask, “Do you discipline your members when they sin? If you don’t, then you do not know what love is.” Likewise, a parent who says, “I love my child too much to spank him” really means, “I love myself too much to endure the pain involved in biblical discipline.” Paul was a gentle and gracious man who knew how to fulfill his duty in defending the truth. Again, John Stott has stated it clearly.

Why did Paul do it? The answer is simple. Paul acted as he did out of a deep concern for the very principle which Peter lacked. He knew that the theological principle at stake was no trivial matter. Martin Luther grasps this admirably: ‘he hath here no trifling matter in hand, but the chiefest article of all Christian doctrine ... For what is Peter? What is Paul? What is an angel from heaven? What are all other creatures to the article of justification? Which if we know, then we are in the clear light; but if we be ignorant thereof, then are we in most miserable darkness.’⁵

Exactly what was the theological principle at stake? Paul twice calls it the “truth of the gospel.” Those fa-

miliar with Paul’s other writing will recognize that he is talking about justification—exactly how poor sinners are forgiven and put right in the sight of God. Sinners are justified by faith alone in Jesus Christ alone and his atoning sacrifice upon the cross alone. The truth of the gospel was, is, and always will be, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ [period] and thou shalt be saved.” Stott explains,

... he is talking about justification—exactly how poor sinners are forgiven and put right in the sight of God. Sinners are justified by faith alone in Jesus Christ alone and his atoning sacrifice upon the cross alone. The truth of the gospel was, is, and always will be, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ [period] and thou shalt be saved.”

Any deviation from this Gospel Paul simply will not tolerate. At the beginning of the Epistle he pronounced a fearful *anathema* on those who distort it (1:8, 9). In Jerusalem he refused to submit to the Judaizers even for a moment, ‘that the truth of the gospel might be preserved’ (2:5). And now in Antioch, out of the same vehement loyalty to the gospel, he withstands Peter to the face because his behaviour has contradicted it. Paul is determined to uphold the gospel at all costs, even at the expense of publicly humiliating a brother apostle.⁶

What are some of the lessons we should learn from this confrontation? First, we may have many different physical sheepfolds of varying stripes and colors dividing Christendom, but there is only one true spiritual sheepfold and one true Shepherd. A church leader is an under-shepherd and never a law unto himself. Likewise, a local church, as a sheepfold of Christ, cannot add essential membership qualifications that Christ the Chief Shepherd has not made. My brother Donald used to ask, “If Christ has accepted an individual into his sheepfold; dare we refuse to accept him or her into

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4. Stott, *One Way*, 53.

5. *ibid.*, 53.

6. *ibid.*, 54.

Misused Texts—Mark 10:17-22

John G. Reisinger

It never ceases to amaze me how men and women will unconsciously allow their theology to color and influence their interpretation and application of specific texts of Scripture. This article will examine one particular passage that people sometimes use to demonstrate how we should preach the gospel. The unstated theological presupposition that underlies the interpretation is that we must apply the law to the conscience as the only means to convict people of sin.

17 And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? 18 And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God. 19 Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother. 20 And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth. 21 Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him, One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me. 22 And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions. (Mark 10:17-22 KJV)

Luke, in his account, presents the man who came to Jesus inquiring about eternal life as a certain ruler. Matthew says he was a young man and Mark says he had great possessions. Put these three descriptions

together and you have “the rich young ruler.” That is the heading for this passage in most Bibles.

I remember hearing a preacher insist that the rich young ruler later returned to Christ and was converted. He was certain of this because the text says that Jesus *loved* the man. This preacher believed that God loved the elect and hated the non-elect. Since Jesus loved this man, he must have been one of the elect. The preacher added two plus two and came up with five. I, too, believe that God loves the elect in a redemptive way in which he does not love all people, but that does not prove that the rich young ruler was one of the elect. To reach that conclusion from this text is to force my theology into the text, rather than to understand the text on its own terms.

A second way to import theology into this passage is to read it as law-centered. Every Covenant Theologian that I have ever heard or read sees this as a law-centered passage. They use this passage to prove we must preach the Ten Commandments before we preach the gospel. They insist that the rich young ruler was covetous and that Jesus pressed the tenth commandment on his conscience in order to convict him of his covetousness. The text itself fails to support such an interpretation. Look at the passage carefully. I think we will see that this is not a law-centered passage at all.

First, nothing in the text suggests that the ruler was covetous. We can conclude from his remark, “I have kept all these [commandments] from my youth” that he was like pre-converted Paul, blameless in his own eyes as to the righteousness of the

law (Phil. 3:6), or self-righteous, but not that he was covetous or that he obtained his great possessions by questionable means. He appears to be an upright, moral, respectful, sincere, typical self-righteous religionist.

Second, in the first exchange, Jesus shows the ruler that by calling him “good Master,” he was calling him God. That is an integral part of the story, especially in the light of the conclusion.

Third, the ruler ran up to Jesus, showing urgency, kneeled down, showing humility and asked a serious question. He asked, “*Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?*” People who act like that and ask that question while acknowledging that Jesus has the authority and knowledge to answer it correctly can hardly be characterized as covetous. Earlier, Mark relates the account of another person who knelt at Jesus’ feet with a request, “*And a leper came to him, imploring him, and kneeling said to him, ‘If you will, you can make me clean’*” (Mark 1:40 ESV). In both instances, the person making the request assumed an appropriate posture of humility.

One of the keys in understanding the passage is in the phrase, “What shall I do?” In other words, how do I earn eternal life? What works must I do? How can I work my way into heaven? This is why Jesus answered the question as he did. “*If you want to earn eternal life by works, then you must keep the whole law perfectly.*” The ruler, in his naive self-righteousness, actually believed he had done

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our sheep fold?” If Christ’s mark is on an individual dare we say, “Sorry, but you must also have our peculiar mark on you before we will accept you into our sheep fold?” If we are unwilling to accept God’s sheep on the same terms on which he accepts them, then we have earned Paul’s censure as much as Peter did.

There is another lesson to be drawn from this situation. We must have the courage to oppose those who oppose the gospel, whether in teaching or in practice. Their stature and popularity should not influence us to be quiet when the gospel itself is at stake. Most of us will never be in Paul’s situation, but we will face similar situations. Let us ask God for cour-

age. We should pray that God would raise up more men like Athanasius, who stood against the whole world when most of Christendom was succumbing to the Arian heresy, and like Luther, who as he faced enemies of the truth, with his life at stake, refused to deny the truth, and cried out, “I will not and cannot recant. Here I stand, so help me God.”

There are all kinds of pressure groups inside and outside the church today. Where are the men of the caliber of Luther and Athanasius who are standing up and being counted? We must do everything we can to promote harmony and unity among the brethren, but never at the expense of the gospel. Every person’s right to his or her own opinion does not mean an individual has a right to teach or prac-

tice error in the church and go unchallenged. We must all walk in step with the truth of the gospel, or our Christianity becomes something less than the life of Christ manifest in us, which is no Christianity at all.

We must mention one last point. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that Peter was the first pope. He is supposed to be the “rock” upon which the church is built. Peter certainly did not act like a solid rock before the taunting of the slave girl during the trial of Jesus and the criticism of the Judaizers at Antioch. While we appreciate all that Peter accomplished for the good of the church, we refuse to acknowledge any Vicar of Christ on earth other than the Holy Spirit. Ω

All Hang Dependent on His Powerful Providence!

William S. Plumer, “The Rock of Our Salvation” 1867

“He holds all creation together” Col. 1:17

“He sustains the universe by the mighty power of His command!” Hebrews 1:3

Jesus Christ upholds, preserves, and governs the worlds which he has made!

Thus all **creatures**, from the smallest insect which is seen by the microscope; up to the archangel which worships before the eternal throne; all **events**, from the falling of a hair of the head to the destruction of nations by famine, pestilence, and war; all **rule** and authority, from that of a petty official, to that of thrones and principalities in heaven; the **material universe**, from the least particle which floats in the sunbeam to the grandest system of worlds which roll in immensity—**all hang dependent on His powerful providence!** And if one link in the chain of that dependence were broken, they would all rush headlong to destruction!

Jesus always has governed this world; and he shall ever hold the scepter over it, until his last foe is vanquished, and his last hidden one made victorious!

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Reisinger, Misused Texts

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that. *“And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth.”* The ruler is still acknowledging Christ as Master and is still unaware of how lost he is.

Fourth, Jesus does not challenge the ruler’s statement that he has obeyed the law nor does he press the tenth commandment on his conscience. Notice exactly what Jesus said: *“One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me.”*

Now this point is important. Several things flow from it. Jesus implicitly equates the ruler’s attitude toward God (“Thou shalt have no other gods before me”) with his attitude toward Jesus (“follow me”). There is a subtle shift away from the Law of Moses, which never commands anyone to give away all his or her possessions in order to keep the covenant, and toward the authority of Christ. The ruler’s response tells the whole story. *“And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions.”* The question no longer concerns the familiar categories of the Mosaic Law. His conscience was

clear with regard to those. The question now is the deity and lordship of Christ. The young man has confessed that he wants eternal life. He has confessed that Jesus is the “good Master.” In essence, then, he has said that he will do whatever Jesus tells him to do in order to inherit eternal life. In reality, however, he did not believe that Jesus was the good Master with the final say. His problem was not with Moses but with Christ. The rich young ruler was really his own master and wanted to remain so. The rich young ruler rejected Jesus Christ as God/Lord; he did not reject the tenth commandment. This is a Deity/Lordship passage and not a law passage.

Lastly, if Jesus is here giving us a pattern for how to preach the gospel, then we must tell every rich young man that he must sell all he has and give it to the poor. We cannot turn how Jesus dealt with one individual into a universal law on how we are to deal with all rich people. Our Lord can indeed demand what he will from anyone. We, however, dare not tell any sinner that he must “sell all and give the proceeds to the poor” in order to inherit eternal life. In no sense is that the gospel.

The light which men got from Moses and the law was at best only starlight compared to noonday.

J.C. Kyle

The heart of the gospel is redemption, and the essence of redemption is the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ.

C. H. Spurgeon

The law was for the condemnation of sinners, the gospel was for the saving of sinners and the ministration of forgiveness.

C.J. Ellicott

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He does whatever He pleases!

Job 23:13

Arthur Pink

Ah, my reader, the God of Scripture is no make-believe monarch, no mere imaginary sovereign; but King of kings, and Lord of lords! To countless thousands, even among those professing to be Christians, the God of the Scriptures is quite unknown.

The god of this twentieth century no more resembles the Supreme Sovereign of Holy Writ, than does the dim flickering of a candle, the glory of the midday sun! The god who is now talked about in the average pulpit, spoken of in the ordinary Sunday School, mentioned in much of the religious literature of the day, and preached in most of the so-called Bible conferences, is the figment of human imagination, an invention of mushy sentimentality!

The heathen outside of the pale of Christendom form gods out of wood and stone; while the millions of heathen inside Christendom manufacture a god out of their own carnal mind! In reality, they are but atheists, for there is no other possible alternative between an absolutely supreme God, and no God at all. A god whose will is resisted, whose designs are frustrated, whose purpose is checkmated, possesses no title to Deity; and so far from being a fit object of worship, merits nothing but contempt!

“Our God is in heaven and does whatever He pleases.” Psalm 115:3

“I know that You can do anything, and no plan of Yours can be thwarted.” Job 42:2

“The Lord does whatever He pleases in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all the depths.” Psalm 135:6

“Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns!”
Revelation 19:6

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