

# Magazine

## Heresy and Factionalism

Mark Mayberry

### Introduction

Heresy and factionalism are obstacles to Christian unity. They must be properly identified and carefully avoided. Therefore, let us consider the meaning and usage of the Greek word *haireisis*, from which the English “heresy” is derived. Associated words include the root verb *haireo*, the related verb *hairetizo*, and the adjective *hairetikos*.

The root verb *haireo*, from which the idea of heresy is derived, means “to take, choose” (Thomas 138). It occurs three times in the NT (Phil. 1:22; 2 Thess. 2:13; Heb. 11:25). God has made certain choices regarding man’s salvation. He determined to save, not specific individuals, as John Calvin affirmed, but rather those who believe the truth and obey the gospel (2 Thess. 2:13-14). As creatures of choice, we must choose wisely and rightly if we are to enjoy his grace. For example, Moses chose to endure ill-treatment with the people of God rather than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin because he was looking to the reward (Heb. 11:24-26). Life’s choices are often difficult: On the one hand, Paul wished to depart and be with Christ; on the other, beloved brethren would benefit by his continued ministry. Struggling over these competing desires, Paul said, “I do not know which to choose” (Phil. 1:21-26).

A related verb *hairetizo*, derived from *haireo*, likewise means, “to choose” (Thomas 140). Occurring only in Mat-

thew 12:18, and consistently translated “chosen” in English Versions, it describes God’s choice of his only Begotten Son as the agent of Messianic salvation (cf. Isa. 42:1).

The noun *haireisis*, which is the primary focus of our present study, similarly derived from *haireo*, refers to a “choice, opinion” (Thomas 139). This word occurs nine times in the NT (Acts 5:17; 15:5; 24:5, 14; 26:5; 28:22; 1 Cor. 11:19; Gal. 5:20; 2 Pet. 2:1). In the NASB95, it is translated “factions” (2x), “heresies” (1x), “sect” (6x).

### As creatures of choice, we must choose between obedience and rebellion.

BDAG say *haireisis* (a term used in Hellenistic Greek especially in reference to political preference or group loyalty) refers to “(1) a group that holds tenets distinctive to it, sect, party, school, faction (of schools of philosophy); (a) of the Sadducees, as sect (Acts 5:17); of the Pharisees

(Acts 15:5); of the Christians (Acts 24:5; cp. v. 14 and 28:22). The last three examples incline toward sense b.; (b) in the later sense, heretical sect; (c) with negative connotation, dissension, a faction (1Co 11:19; Gal 5:20); (2) that which distinguishes a group’s thinking, opinion, dogma.”

Louw & Nida define *haireisis* as (1) “a division or group based upon different doctrinal opinions and/or loyalties and hence by implication in certain contexts an unjustified party or group (applicable in the NT to religious parties)—‘religious party, sect’ (Acts 5:17; 15:5; 24:5, 14;

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# “In Essentials Unity; In Non-Essentials, Liberty; In All Things Love” (1)

Mike Willis



“In essentials, unity. In non-essentials, liberty. In all things love.” This is one of the most popular slogans common to the restoration heritage. Its origin goes back much further than the restoration movement. Some think that it goes back to the time of Augustine who is thought to have written,

In essentials unity,  
 In doubtful things liberty,  
 But in all things love.

However, Hans Rollmann argues that the statement originated with Peter Meiderlin during the seventeenth century (“In Essentials Unity”: The Pre-History and History of a Restoration Movement Slogan”).

Regardless of who originated it, the slogan became part of the common heritage of Protestantism. It is quoted on such diverse web sites as that of United Church of Christ (<http://www.ucc.org/aboutus/whatis.htm>), the Moravians (<http://www.rhmc.org/beliefs.htm>), Evangelical Free Church of America (<http://www.google.com/search?q=%22in+essentials+unity%22&hl=en&lr=&start=10&sa=N> where the statement is attributed to Chrysostom), and a host of other sites. This confirms that the principle has been widely recognized throughout Christianity that unity cannot be had by conformity in all things, as is also revealed by Romans 14.

### A Biblical Principle

The statement reflects a sound Bible principle. The Scriptures distinguish between those things that are essential and those that are indifferent. Paul alluded to circumcision and eating of meats as things that fell into the category of things indifferent when he wrote, “Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God” (1 Cor. 7:19). Again, he wrote, “For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love” (Gal. 5:6). This acknowledges that there is a category of things that are right within themselves but are not required of men for salvation; they are indifferent, non-essential.

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# Troubled Over Sickness

Connie W. Adams

Sooner or later sickness invades the homes and lives of all of us. Some of it is minor, but sometimes it is major, long lasting and terminal, and results in drastic changes in the lives of the sick and those who attend them. This often creates tremendous stress on all involved. Let's talk about it.

## Origin and Nature of Sickness

Sickness is part of the process of dying which is the penalty for sin entering the world. Before sin, Adam and Eve lived in total absence of care, want, grief, pain, sickness or death. What a paradise! But when they violated God's clearly stated law about eating of the tree in the midst of the garden (Gen. 2:16-17), things changed drastically. God said, "In the day you eat thereof you shall surely die." From that day the curse of death hovered over them and all their posterity, including us. Eve's pain in childbearing was multiplied (Gen. 3:16). Adam's work was complicated as the ground was cursed with thorns and weeds (Gen. 3:17-19). Because of their rebellion, the earth was transformed into the land of the dying. With the imposition of physical death, all things connected with it were now involved, including sickness and disease. These are to be viewed as a part of the process of dying. The spiritual death was the worst of all for it separated man from his creator and sustainer.

The whole human race is under the penalty of death since the fall. Sickness or disease are no more a punishment for you than they are for all humankind. Jesus denied that such affliction is always due to personal sin. In John 9:2-3 he said that man was not blind because of his sin nor that of his parents. Job was a righteous man, yet he suffered terribly and had no idea why. Herod was wicked and was eaten of worms (Acts 12:20-23). The beggar, Lazarus, was a good man and wound up in Abraham's bosom after his death (Luke 16:19-31). No doubt, some sins contribute to disease. Think of AIDS and other venereal diseases, alcoholism and other drugs, and smoking to name a few. These do have physical effects. But sickness, generally, is the common lot of all because of the process of dying, and death has passed upon all (Heb. 9:27). Paul said that in death the body is "sown in weakness" (1 Cor. 15:42-44). That means weak, infirm, feeble, without energy, infirm in body, sick, sickly.

## Diseases of the Bible

Lest we think we are unique or the first to suffer ailments, consider these diseases mentioned in the Bible: Abscess (2 Kings 20:7); atrophy (Job 16:8); blindness (Matt. 9:27); boils and blains (Exod. 9:10); consumption (Deut. 28:22); deafness (Mark 7:32); debility (Ps. 102:23); dropsy (Luke 14:2);

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dumbness (Matt. 9:32); dysentery (2 Chron. 21:12-19); hemorrhoids (Deut. 28:27); fever (Deut. 28:22); speech impediment (Mark 7:32); itch (Deut. 28:27); inflammation (Deut. 28:22); issue of blood (Matt. 9:20); lameness (2 Sam. 4:4); leprosy (Lev. 13:2); loss of appetite (Job 33:20); lunacy (Matt. 4:24); melancholy (1 Sam. 16:14); palsy (Matt. 8:6); plague (Num. 11:33); scab (Deut. 28:27); sunstroke (2 Kings 4:18-20); ulcers (Isa. 1:6); worms (Acts 12:33). Others could be listed, but these should be enough to convince us that sickness is not new and that it has been around in great variety over time.

### **The Origin of Diseases**

Faith healers insist that sickness is directly imposed by Satan. But sometimes it was directly imposed by God. In the case of Herod, an “angel of the Lord smote him” (Acts 12:23). Sometimes Satan was allowed to afflict some (Job 2:6-7; Luke 13:16). Sometimes it was self-induced by intemperance. One was “sick with bottles of wine” (Hos. 7:5). It was sent as direct punishment for sin in the form of consumption and fever (Lev. 26:14-16). God’s judgment on a sinful land was sometimes pestilence with attendant diseases (Ezek. 14:19-21). It was sometimes spread by contagion from one land to another (Deut. 7:15). Sins of youth may be responsible for some illnesses (Job. 20:11). Excessive excitement or emotional stress may induce infirmity. Daniel fainted after his vision of future things (Dan. 8:27). Accidents may lead to illness. King Ahaziah fell through the lattice from an upper chamber (2 Kings 1:2). Joram suffered from wounds inflicted by the Syrians (2 Kings 8:29). Acts of violence produce affliction (Mic. 6:13). But from whatever source, diseases are a fact of life and cause us to be troubled.

### **Our Bodies Belong to God**

“What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Cor. 6:19-20). Our bodies are to be used in obedience to the will of God. The current arrogance which says, “My body is my own and I will do with it whatever I will” is completely contrary to the teaching of the Bible. That is why so many of the politically correct crowd are contemptuous of the Bible and of those who believe it. Paul said, “I keep under my body and bring it into subjection” (1 Cor. 9:27). Our members must not be yielded as instruments of sin (Rom. 6:19). Paul said we are to “crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts thereof” (Gal. 5:24).

Since our bodies are the houses in which we serve God and they are his, not ours, then we ought to be good stewards of our bodies. We need proper rest and exercise. We have become a nation of overweight and under-exercised people. We need to use some common sense in keeping our bodies as strong and healthy as we can. If you will take care of the

body God has given you, then you can prolong your days and your service to God and man. If you do not, then you will pay a price and so will others.

### **When Sickness Strikes**

When you are the victim, some of the greatest challenges of your life face you. First, your own attitude toward life and death are vitally important. Will you be bitter, or a blessing to those around you? Some of the most cheerful people I have ever known were suffering from diseases from which they knew they would not recover. I have often gone to try to lift the spirits of some of these only to come away with my own spirit refreshed because of their pleasant, hopeful and grateful attitudes. There are some things you cannot change, but you can make the best of them. Your attitude toward yourself is vital. Your sense of self-worth must not suffer. You are still made in the image of God and he still loves you and cares about you. Personal pride can suffer. Don’t ever get to the place that you just don’t care. Watch out for envy of those who are yet strong and healthy. If others have to wait on you, then be a good patient, not a pain in the neck. Take stock. Determine what you can do and cannot do, then go from there.

When you are the caregiver, there are also special challenges for you. Your whole life may be greatly changed. Your attitude is important to your own peace of mind and to the one for whom you are caring. Watch out for the martyr complex. If you feel put upon, trapped, then not only will your patient sense this and cause him/her to feel even more that they are a burden, but it also has something to do with your own soul and your standing before God. The human spirit is never more noble than when it serves those who need us most. Sickness provides opportunity to practice what we preach. Jesus said, “Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye did it unto me” (Matt. 25: 40).

I have seen many examples of tender, loving care, but two of them were especially close to me. My mother-in-law cared for her husband at home for eighteen years. He was bed-fast and his mind was affected so that normal conversation was not possible. She was in middle age when he was stricken. Some asked her why she did not put him in a nursing home and get on with her life. She said, “He is my husband and I’ll take care of him.” And she did as long as he lived. My own father was confined to his bed for a long time. His mental capacities were impaired. While he was hospitalized, the doctor told my mother she would not be able to care for him at home. She said, “You watch me!” She did what they said she could not do. Greatly hindered by arthritis she, with the help of my aunt who lived with them, took care of him. He never even had a bed sore. She could get him to eat and that took time and patience. When some commended her for what she was doing, she said, “He is my husband. He is a good man and has taken care



# Are You Growing?

David Dann

In writing to the Ephesians concerning the work of the local church, the apostle Paul states that one of the primary functions of the church is to equip each member to the extent, “That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ” (Eph. 4:14-15).

Once a man becomes a Christian, the Lord expects him to grow spiritually for the rest of his life. Although it is a wonderful time of rejoicing when someone obeys the gospel, it is vitally important for us to realize that the act of baptism is not the end of the matter. Each child of God must improve his spiritual condition and build upon his relationship with God as he continues in his walk with Christ. Each of us must grow.

While we may be able to identify several obstacles that can prevent our growth, it is also necessary for us to identify the positive signs of growth. We should be able to determine whether or not we are growing spiritually by whether or not our growth makes itself manifest in our lives. The progress, or lack thereof, that we display in certain areas will be proof of where we stand in our spiritual growth. Some of these areas include:

**1. Knowledge of God’s word.** The apostle Peter exhorts us to “desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby” (1 Pet. 1:2). There is a direct connection between our knowledge of the Bible and our spiritual growth. It is almost always true that as our knowledge of God’s word increases, so does our faith, since “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). Do you know more about the Bible than you did last year? Do you understand more passages of Scripture and more

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of me for a long time. He would do the same for me.” She did not think she was doing anything out of the ordinary, or that was especially noble.

The serious illness of a child, or an accident which leaves one impaired creates great changes in a family. Sometimes, a mother becomes so consumed that she neglects her other children and her husband. I have known of cases where this led to divorce. Be careful here to keep your priorities straight. Learn to share the care with others in the family. They need to be involved too. Sometimes, after agonizing soul searching, a loved one may have to be placed in a facility which can provide care which is not possible otherwise. It is easy for those on the outside looking in to be harsh and judgmental. It is not the time for you to be a busybody or a meddler in other people’s business.

Sickness tries our patience and that of those who care for us. It requires great changes in a family. It tests our

faith and character and commitment to the truth. It brings financial worries. Lifestyles may have to be altered to cope with increased expenses and sometimes reduced income. Life may never be the same again. But we can learn from Paul who had a “thorn in the flesh” for which he pleaded with the Lord three times that it might be removed. God’s answer was, “My grace is sufficient for thee” (2 Cor. 12:7-10). Pray and trust the Lord. Think of Job every now and then who suffered in agony but who still said, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust him” (Job 13:15).

Keep heaven in your heart, for there we shall be admitted to the tree of life and there will be no more death, nor sorrow (Rev. 21:4; 22:3). “For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us” (Rom. 8:18). There we shall meet the Great Physician.

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fundamental truths of God’s word than you did last year? You should. A growing Christian is a studying Christian. Peter closes his second letter with an exhortation to, “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18).

**2. Regular attendance.** It is remarkable that not much is said in the New Testament along the lines of exhorting brethren to be regular in attending the worship services and Bible studies of the local church. The obvious reason not much is said about attendance is that, for a growing Christian, not much needs to be said! Christians who are growing are always eager to meet with the saints, eager to encourage others by their presence, eager to contribute, and eager to learn. One clear measure of a Christian’s growth and maturity is his willingness to make worship and Bible study a top priority each week. For those who are not growing as they should, the Hebrew writer warns against the habit of “forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is” (Heb. 10:25).

**3. Desire to serve.** A growing Christian is one who views himself as a servant of the Master. While every member of the local church may not serve in the same capacity, there is certainly service available for all. Paul says, “But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him” (1 Cor. 12:18). A growing Christian looks for ways to serve his brothers and sisters in Christ (Gal. 5:13). Those who are growing also look for ways to serve in whatever capacity they are needed as far as the work of the church is concerned. This desire may manifest itself in a willingness to teach a class, visit the sick, or talk to a co-worker about the gospel. In addition, the desire to serve will lead men to contribute in public worship by offering to lead prayers, lead singing, or preach.

**4. Resisting temptation.** One of the sure signs of spiritual growth is an increased strength in resisting temptation. James writes, “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (Jas. 4:7). A growing Christian is one who has made himself ready to raise the shield of faith in opposition to the fiery darts of the devil. Those who are consistently overcome by the same temptations and entangled in sin are not growing. Our level of spiritual growth becomes obvious when we are faced with having to exercise self-control in the face of temptation. We ought to be making progress in our personal battles with sin.

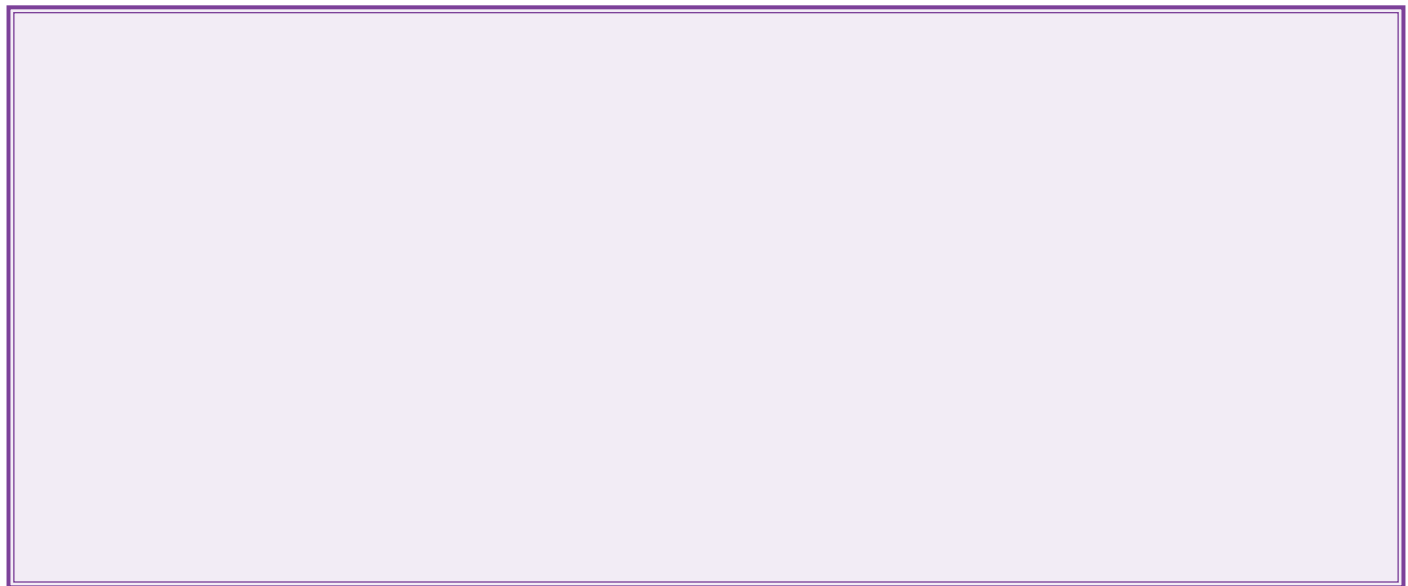
**5. Love for God and man.** A growing Christian grows in his love for God as he draws nearer to him. As we gain a deeper appreciation for our Savior, we come to love him more. For, “We love him, because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). In addition to this, we must progress in our love for our brothers and sisters in Christ. Paul praised the Thessalonians for their growth in this regard in writing, “We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth” (1 Thess. 1:3). True spiritual growth is accompanied by an increase in love. Growing Christians are “kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honor preferring one another” (Rom. 12:10).

### Conclusion

“For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace” (Rom. 8:5-6). Is your focus on earthly things or spiritual things? Are you growing?

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# Whose Wife?

William V. Beasley

Jesus Christ sustains many and varied relationships to the church. In relationship to the church Jesus is presented in the New Testament as the *builder* (Matt. 16:18), as its *head* (Eph. 1:22; 4:15; 5:23; Col. 1:18), its *Savior* (Eph. 5:23), and Jesus is also presented as the *bridegroom* (Matt. 9:15; Mark 2:19-20; Luke 5:34-35; John 3:29), with the church, of course, as the bride/wife (Eph. 5:25-27; Rev. 21:2, 9; 22:17).

It is customary in our society, and in many other societies, for the bride/wife to take the name of her groom/husband. It would hurt me not a little if my wife wanted to known as Mrs. Jacobson. Our custom is not without Bible precedence. After the creation of Eve, to be Adam's *suitable companion* ("help meet"—Gen. 2:18, 20), it was said, "This is the book of the generations of Adam. In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made he him; male and female created he them, and blessed them, and called their name Adam, in the day when they were created" (Gen. 5:1-2). Note that it does not say *called his name Adam*, but it says "called their name Adam." If we were to put this in keeping with our customs, I suppose her name would have been Mrs. Eve Adam. The expression "wife of" is found at least forty-nine times in the ASV Bible; all the way from "Milcah, the wife of Nahor" (Gen. 24:15) to "the bride, the wife of the Lamb" (Rev. 21:9). More than half of the forty-nine times we read "wife of" in holy writ the *of* is followed by a man's name. At times, the word *wife* has been added by the translators, and what is said literally (in one instance) is "Mary the of Clopas" (John 19:25). Thus, Mary and the others were identified by having their husband's name added to their own name.

The ancient peoples did not at first have surnames, but these developed as a means of accurate communication. At times, the surname depicted a relationship, such as "son of" (found 1600 times in the ASV Bible). There are numerous examples of this in our society with the addition of a suffix (Jackson, Johnson, etc.) or a prefix (MacAdams, McKnight, von Ryan, etc.). At other times the surname was because of occupation (Smith, Carpenter, Miller), or because of what one had originated or practiced. This is true, I believe, of the cousin of Jesus, John the Baptist. His name could convey the idea of John the Immerser, or, more likely, John the first to immerse (i.e., first one commanded of God to

immerse people for a spiritual reason). Since John there have been many who could be called Baptist (Immerser) because of having baptized individuals. This was true in New Testament times, but none other is labeled a *Baptist*. Paul immersed people (1 Cor. 1:14), but we do not read of *Paul the Baptist*. In holy writ John alone is *the Baptist*.

Since the church is the body of Christ (Eph. 1:22-23) and his bride, the church ought to wear his name, or, at least, show relationship to him . . . if a name (designator) is to be worn at all. This is apparent in the use of "church of God" (Jesus is Deity/God), "church of the Lord" (Acts 20:28) and "churches of Christ" (Rom. 16:16). Most of the time there is no designator used in the New Testament; with denominationalism still unknown, the bride of Christ is simply referred to as "the church." This is, by the way, the most popular way to refer to the people of God, by God's people today. For example, we would generally say something like, "He is a member of the church," or "Is she a member of the church?" without the "of Christ" added.

Since the church was purchased with the shed blood of Jesus (Acts 20:28), is his spiritual body (Eph. 1:22-23), and his bride/wife (Eph. 5:22ff.), etc. why should the church wear the name of another. Jesus did not shed his precious blood so his cousin could have a bride, and yet there are multiplied thousands who put the name of Jesus' cousin on what they consider to be the bride of Christ. I speak, of course, of the term "Baptist Church." Since John was/is *the Baptist*, then Baptist Church could refer to none other. Jesus did not suffer the agonies (physical, mental, and spiritual) so his bride could wear the name of Martin Luther, John Calvin, John or Charles Wesley, or Menno Simmons. Whose wife are we?

Would not the preachers, members, leaders of these various groups (Mennonites, Lutherans, Wesleyans, Calvinists, Baptists), by their action of giving the bride of Christ the name of another man, be giving their own wives tacit permission to keep their maiden name or to wear the name of another man? Yes, . . . but . . . woe be unto the wife who does so.

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# Human Suffering (2)

Bob Waldron

**It is God's *dunamis*, his power, that upholds nature itself. God channels this power into natural laws that govern the operation of the universe. He works through these laws. But just because we are limited by these laws does not mean that God is.**

## **How Active Is God in Men's Affairs Today?**

We have discussed the laws of nature at some length and rightfully so. Human suffering is explained to a great extent by the operation of these laws. I do not, however, want to leave the impression that God does nothing today. It would be good to note three positions it would be possible to hold with regard to God's participation today in the events of the universe.

**1. God is not behind anything that happens to men today.** Sometimes, in order to show that miracles are not being done today, we almost put God out to pasture. The Bible teaches that God is active today.

On Mars Hill in Athens, Paul said, "He made of one every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, *having determined their appointed seasons, and the bounds of their habitations*" (Acts 17:26). God's judgment against the Roman Empire, as presented in Revelation, also shows that God is involved in the affairs of men. Many other passages might be cited to show this involvement of God personally in human affairs, including the very basic premise that if there is any hope of receiving help from God through prayer, then God *must* be active in human affairs.

**2. God is directly behind everything that happens to men today.** There was among the Jews the common attitude that God was behind

everything that happened to anyone, good or bad. If something bad happened, as in the case of the blind man (John 9), God was punishing that person. The apostles asked, "Who sinned, this man, or his parents, that he should be born blind?" Jesus exposed the error of this concept by saying that sin was not the cause of the blindness, but that God would nevertheless use the blindness of the man for his own purposes.

If something good occurred to someone, on the other hand, then God was showing his approval of that individual. This idea is false as is pointed out in numerous passages. In Job 21:7-16 and in Psalm 73:1-17, it is shown that often the wicked do very well in this world while the righteous suffer. Therefore, suffering cannot be an infallible implication of wickedness, nor can prosperity necessarily be a sign of righteousness.

Let me point out emphatically that there is absolutely no way we can ascertain today if God specifically causes a certain thing to happen. You see, we have no prophet to tell us that this particular drought is God-caused, or that this locust swarm was specifically sent by God. We cannot know.

If God were specifically behind every single thing that happens, we would have a deterministic world in which there would be no chance. God would personally and specifically control every event that occurred. Yet



we have already shown that chance is a biblical concept (Eccl. 9:11).

This view would also rule out all choice on man's part. Yet that man has a choice in life and in his service to God is one of the plainest lessons taught throughout the Bible (see Josh. 24:15; Rev. 22:17).

**3. God is directly behind some things that happen today, but not all things.** The process of elimination leaves us with the alternative that God does not directly specifically cause every event that happens, but he is involved directly in some things that occur. We cannot know when he is personally and directly involved and when he is not.

#### Providence, Prayer, and Divine Power

Perhaps it would be profitable to study the *manner* of God's involvement with the affairs of the world. The question of how God's providence works for us and the question of how our prayers are answered are both closely related to God's involvement in men's affairs.

God operates his universe, both physical and spiritual, through laws which he has ordained. These laws are for things which are not absolute or unchanging, including man. The universe remains only because God upholds it (Heb. 1:3). It is what it is only because God makes it so. The universe is not absolute or unchanging (Heb. 1:10-12). It is only what God's ordained laws make it. Likewise, man is not absolute. He, also, must have laws to govern what he is and what he ought to be.

On the other hand, if a Being or thing is absolute, there is no law for it. God is absolute and unchanging. He is simply what he is. We can observe characteristics of his nature, but these are not features he chooses to have, but which are inherent in his being. Therefore, there are no laws which are made for him to obey. Since Deity is

the only thing with these unchanging qualities, then Deity is the only Being that exists, or that ever has or ever will exist, that is subject to no laws. He has made all laws that govern all things, but he is subject to no law himself. We would do well to remember that.

It is God's *dunamis*, his power, that upholds nature itself. God channels this power into natural laws that govern the operation of the universe. He works through these laws. But just because we are limited by these laws does not mean that God is. God does not use his power to intrude upon our human awareness in a miraculous manifestation, but he nevertheless uses his power behind the curtain of nature in marvelous ways. I believe that Revelation 4 portrays God's *dunamis* at work upholding all things and active to perform all of the tasks God does in time and the universe (Rom. 4:5).

Our trouble is in understanding how God can exercise a special providence over us without working a miracle. What we need to realize is that from our human view, we will see providence as expressed in nature by the provisions God has made for our welfare. God will not instantly change a blue sky into a raging storm, but he can certainly cause a cloud to rise and grow into a storm. Read 1 Kings 18 and James 5:16-18. God made a cloud to rise in direct response to a prayer by Elijah. That particular cloud would not have come at that moment if God had not *made* it come. From God's side, it was a deed accomplished by his power. From man's side, it was a phenomenon of nature. It was not, however, a miracle. If it had been, then James could not have used the example of Elijah's prayer as an encouragement for us to pray.

That divine power, that infinite power works for our good and awaits our prayers (Rom. 8:28; Jas. 5:16-18). What an incentive it would be for our faithfulness in prayer if we could realize this truth.

From this reasoning, we see how God can definitely be active in the affairs of men without miracles occurring on every hand.

#### Seals, Trumpets, and Bowls

In Revelation 6 we read about the opening of the seals on a scroll given to Christ by God. Results follow the opening of the seals. In this vision, we see God's involvement in human affairs and the results that follow. Revelation 8-11 tells of the blowing of trumpets. These are trumpets of warning to the wicked. Chapters 15-16 show the bowls of God's wrath poured out on the wicked. In these three sections of Revelation, we see the different relationship toward calamities of various kinds sustained by the Christian and by the wicked.

Space forbids an extensive discussion of these passages. Let me summarize and combine the teaching of all three by an illustration:

The Titanic was a British luxury ocean liner that sank on its maiden voyage in 1912 with a loss of at least 1500 lives. The 882½ foot Titanic was the world's largest ship at that time and was considered unsinkable. In fact, the point was boasted. The ship side-swiped an iceberg, and a three hundred foot gash was torn through the hull. It sank within three hours.

It would be interesting to speculate that maybe the hand of God was involved in this great calamity because men had made their boast and had under-estimated the powers of nature. Or, to put it more aptly, men had over-estimated their own powers. Note this point carefully however: *It would be completely unfounded to affirm that God caused the accident.* We have no prophet to tell us for sure. Sometimes things happen by chance. Sometimes, God makes things happen. But either way, God makes use of all such tragedies.

Let us see how God can make use of calamity by considering three

imaginary people. The first is a Christian who died in the sinking of the Titanic. The second is a wicked man who died likewise. The third is a wicked man who survived.

To the Christian, the sinking of the Titanic did not come as a punishment of some kind. It was a catastrophe he was involved in, and, consequently, he died. That Christian, however, overcame because he remained faithful to God to the end and he went to a better place.

To the wicked man who died, the sinking of the ship was a bowl of wrath. He knew that catastrophes do happen. He knew he was unprepared to die. Therefore, when he died, his opportunity for repentance was forever removed. A bowl of God's wrath was poured out upon him.

The wicked man who survived looked upon those who perished and thought how easily it could have been he who perished. To him was afforded a most valuable opportunity to repent. To him, the disaster was a trumpet of warning.

God did not show respect of persons in the case of the two wicked men. He simply did not avert what happened to them, and in both cases, his purpose was served.

### The Secret Things Belong to God

Throughout this whole study, we need to remember Moses' statement: "The secret things belong to God, but the things that are revealed are for us and for our children" (Deut. 29:29). God has a providence that works for our good (Rom. 8:28). He will act in answer to prayer (James 5:16-18). In answer to prayer, he will bless us with good and will deliver us from evil. But exactly *how* does he do it? We cannot answer with certainty.

The principle of God's hearing our prayers cannot be interpreted in such a way as to mean that we will never get sick or die. It is the same God who hears our prayers who says we must some day die (Heb. 9:27).

All the elements of God's purpose must be considered. One element must not be pressed to the exclusion of the other. In other words, God's care over us does not rule out his allowing suffering.

We must always pray, "Thy will be done." Our will must be subject to the Father's will. God always answers the prayers of the faithful, but He answers in His own time, and, sometimes, the answer is "No."

### Questions Frequently Asked

**1. Is it God's will that a particular person die?** Only rarely. It was God's will that the world's population die in the flood *because they would not repent*. It was God's will that Nadab and Abihu die (Lev. 10); and that Korah, Dathan, and Abiram die (Num. 16). God used their deaths to teach specific lessons to his people Israel. Ordinarily, it is *not* God who specifically causes people to die. And today, if he did, no one could know because God does not work miracles before men today, nor is there a prophet to inform us about such activities of God today.

**2. Does God know when a particular person will die?** God is all-knowing. Some say he knows anything he chooses to know. Let us not get into endless metaphysical arguments about such things. Merely because God knows a thing will happen does not mean that his knowledge *makes* it happen, anymore than my knowledge that spring comes after winter will make spring come. This question is closely related to the next question. Notice it.

**3. If God does know that a particular person is going to die at a certain time, why does he not avert their death?** Death is ordained of God because of the entrance of sin into the world. We do not live in a paradise. Death has its purpose in God's plan. Therefore, he cannot avert death always without defeating his own purposes.

Besides, if God averted death, would it be for everyone, for just a few? If for a few, would it be only for those who asked him to do so? That would require that one know beforehand that he is about to die so he would know to ask! How could God avert death for a few without being a respecter of persons? If he did avert death, which occasion of death should he avert, the first, or the nine hundredth? Soon, God would be forced to give eternal life on earth. That right was forfeited by man in the Garden of Eden.

**4. Is a person put here to fulfill a certain obligation and then die?** Yes, but not as you might think. The writer of Ecclesiastes says, "All hath been heard: Fear God, and keep His commandments for this is the whole duty of man" (Eccl. 12:13). Most of us do not fulfill this purpose, but that is the only specific purpose God requires of accountable beings.

God has sometimes used men in his purpose without their realizing it. Isaiah said of the Assyrians, "Howbeit he meaneth not so" (Isa. 10:7). God sometimes called men for a specific mission, but those men acted as free, moral agents. God does not use men like a paper towel to be then



tossed away. He takes a puny, weak, sinful mortal, cleanses him of his sin and gives him life and immortality through the gospel (2 Tim. 1:10).

Is the idea in this question that a person is put on earth to complete some important task and then to be taken away? Or perhaps, some might think that a person is put on the earth because, in the scheme of things, he is to turn on a water faucet on June 3 at 3 P.M. in the year 2000. When he has done that, then he will die. Regardless of whether the thing be big or little that is thus performed, the idea is false. Such a concept would make each individual merely a cog in the machinery of the universe. It would require a universe in which every single thing is pre-determined. As we have already stressed, in such a world, there would be no such thing as choice or chance. Yet the Bible teaches both (Josh. 24:15; Eccl. 9:11).

**5. Does God give and take away life?** After the death of his children and the loss of his property, Job said, “The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 1:21). In the sense that in God “we live and move and have our being,” we could say that God gives life. In fact, Paul told the Athenians, “He Himself giveth to all life, and breath, and all things” (Acts 17:25).

God has provided for the life force to be given, but how it is given is a riddle. It is not simply a matter of chemistry. Life is generated from life. Whether life is generated purely by physical, chemical, and biological laws, or whether God himself puts that indefinable spark of life into each living being specifically, I cannot say for certain. I rather think that the spark of animal life is passed through the seed which contains the life germ according to God’s laws.

We must distinguish between the immortal soul and the life principle which animates even the brute beast. The soul comes directly from God (Eccl. 12:7). There is no natural law that reproduces souls. But he does not snatch each person’s soul away at his whim.

The laws God has ordained in nature therefore provide for the transmission of life from parents to offspring and for the eventual death of all living things. Hence, in a general way, the Lord gives and takes life. He does not do so for each specific person.

**6. Can the devil cause someone’s death?** In the story of Job, he was afflicted by the devil. Job’s children were slain by Satan’s work. He *could* have killed Job, or caused him to be killed, or else God would not have warned, “Behold, he is in thy hand; only spare his life” (Job 2:6).

To what extent Satan can do similar things today we do not know. He is bound (Rev. 20:2-3), but not bound necessarily in that way. It is entirely possible that he can still

do these things today. It is certain that he can use calamity to seek to turn men away from God. It is Satan who does this. God cannot shield us from this temptation without removing our opportunity to exercise our free will, but shame on us if we give Satan the occasion to throw our failure into God’s face!

**7. Why do we pray, “Thy will be done”?** First, because Jesus so taught his disciples (Matt. 6:10). Second, remember that Jesus prayed in the garden, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass away from me” (Matt. 26:39). That was what Christ desired, but realizing that would not be best, he then added, “Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.”

The real point of this question is that since God’s will is going to be done anyway, why do I have to pray that it be done? Why pray for what I want? We are to want what God wants. That is what “Thy will be done” means. However, we do not know to what extent God’s will involves the details of our daily existence. It may be that God may change his will in some detail to accommodate his children when they pray to him.

In the days of King Hezekiah of Judah, God sent the prophet Isaiah to tell the king that he was going to die and not live (2 Kings 20:1). Hezekiah wept sore and prayed earnestly to God that he not die. God sent the prophet back to tell Hezekiah that he had heard his prayer and had seen his tears. Therefore, God promised to heal him and he would not die. This story clearly illustrates that prayer has an influence upon God and may cause him to change his will (2 Kings 20:1-11).

If God can grant a petition without upsetting his grand scheme of things, and if he feels that it would be good for us, then he will grant our prayer.

**8. If a thing happens, was that God’s will?** This question is closely related to the first one. The answer is, “Not necessarily.” Many people will perish, but God is not desirous or willing that any should perish (2 Pet. 3:9). There are many things that have happened in history that were not God’s will. This does not mean he tried to stop it and failed. We are flirting with the doctrine of determinism again. Merely because God has a will does not mean that everything is pre-determined. If that were so, then there would be no free, moral agency in man to choose his destiny. Joshua told Israel, “*Choose you* this day whom you will serve” (Josh. 24:14-15). Nor would there be any factor of chance. Therefore, not everything that happens is God’s will, though he *permits them to happen*. Jesus explained that what God *wanted* was one thing, and what he *allowed* on occasion was another (Matt. 19:4-8).

**9. Where is the line drawn between things that just happen and things God makes happen?** Or where is

# J.T. Smith Is Unhappy

Weldon Warnock

Brother J.T. Smith recently expressed his displeasure in his paper, *Gospel Truths, Inc.*, about a few *things*, Gospel Truths, Inc. is a corporation or body politic through which he and his collective writers preach or teach. Brother Smith criticized Guardian of Truth Foundation, Florida College, the exchange between Connie Adams and me in *Truth Magazine* on divorce and remarriage and Mike Willis' editorial comments about the exchange.

## Guardian of Truth Foundation

The Guardian of Truth Foundation has come under attack by J.T. for having an annual lectureship which is conducted at Bowling Green, Kentucky. He contends that a human organization has no scriptural right to preach the gospel. The fact that the gospel is taught by GOT through *Truth Magazine* doesn't matter, evidently, with brother Smith; just when it is done orally from a platform. Perhaps if those who appear on the lectureship would stand up on the platform and read an assigned article they had prepared for publication in *Truth Magazine*, it would be acceptable to brother Smith.

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the line between things under our control and things God controls? Again I say we must reject a mechanical, deterministic view of life which would give us no control of our destiny. Likewise, we have to reject the idea that God has nothing to do with the universe. God controls all things in the sense that all things are under his laws. He does not control all things in the sense that he makes every specific thing happen. Obviously, if I am a creature of choice, I can choose some things. God also exercises a providential control over his creation. To say where a line is drawn, however, is impossible, since we have no prophet to tell us when a specific action has been taken by God.

Suffering is inevitable. It is common to all men. Each Christian, with patience and faith, must endure whatever trials may come. Remember Paul's statement that "our light affliction which is for the moment worketh for us more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory" (2 Cor. 4:17).

But brother Smith says we sing and pray. So? Surely J.T. is not saying that the only place we can sing and pray is in the assembly of the local church? Paul and Silas sang and prayed in jail at Philippi (Acts 16:25), and singing in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 is not confined to just the public assembly of the church. I thought the saints of God could sing and pray anywhere, so, what is the problem? Brethren have singings in their homes all the time. Too, they have Bible study and prayer as a home function. There are singing, praying, and preaching at funerals in funeral homes. Anything wrong with that?

It is interesting to observe that J.T. is preaching or teaching through a human organization, Gospel Truths, Inc. To be incorporated is to have a corporation. Hence, brother Smith and his collectivity of writers are doing the very same thing they condemn the Guardian of Truth Foundation for doing. Oh, consistency, where art thou? "Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest not thyself" (Rom. 2:21)? When J.T. brings his practice in line with his teaching, then we might hear him more clearly.





### Florida College

It appears that brother Smith has had a conversion in recent years in regard to Florida College. He now questions its right to have its annual Bible lectureship because the college is a human organization teaching the gospel, singing, and praying. Well, I remember back not too many years ago that I saw brother Smith there about every year at those “unscriptural” lectures enjoying himself. Not only that but I recall his appearing on the lectureship as one of the speakers. J.T., have you repented and made a confession? I haven’t heard anything about it if you have. We will be waiting for that acknowledgment in a future issue of *Gospel Truths*, Inc.

### Adams-Warnock Exchange

Brother Smith introduces several Scriptures before he gets to the main thrust of his article on “Is There Truth On Every Bible Subject?” wherein he reviews briefly some selective things about Connie and me as well as Mike Willis. He lists John 8:31-32; 17:17; 2 John 1:9-11; 1 John 1:5-7; Ephesians 5:11 and then he sets out to make Mike Willis, Connie Adams, and myself as compromisers of the foregoing Scriptures. J.T., you can do better than that. We all believe those passages as strongly as you do, and we endeavor to follow them. I have preached those passages as well as brethren Adams and Willis with fervor through the years. So, just take a deep breath, relax, and cheer up.

J.T. implies in his article that Connie and I are covering for one another because we are grandpas-in-law. How nice of brother Smith to go out of his way to offer such a wonderful compliment! Brother Connie Adams stated his disagreement with me on this issue of divorce and remarriage back in March of 1986 in *Searching the Scriptures*. That has been over nineteen years ago. That was left behind us and we went on working together in the kingdom of God. That was not even a test of fellowship for you then, J.T. Some brethren, including some preachers, didn’t have a tizzy then, wanting to divide over it. But today, oh today is a different story. Brother Smith, including some others, is determined to make this issue a test of fellowship and consign all to hell who disagree with him, except his bosom friends who disagree with him on some aspects of divorce and remarriage, like going to the courthouse. Listen brother Smith: Connie Adams will never bend, vacillate, equivocate, or compromise his convictions for friendship, even for a grandpa-in-law. And, the same is true for me and Mike Willis. We don’t put our loyalty to friends above or equal to our allegiance to Christ our Lord, Your insinuation that we do is an insult, to say the least.

### How Far Will He Go?

Brother Smith, how far are you ready to push this fellowship question and splinter the *church*? Why just zero in on who divorces who first in regard to fellowship and forget all the other issues over which brethren differ and

have never resolved, except possibly in their own minds? Why not mention the following and start drawing lines with brethren who differ with you: (1) A Christian bearing arms in the military. Are they murderers? I don’t believe they are, but some brethren do hold that position. (2) Sunday night communion. Some say it is unscriptural, even some of your friends, unless the whole church breaks bread again on Sunday night with the few (two or three or so). Why don’t they withdraw from you? Remember, you asked: “Is There Truth On Every Bible Subject?” Why then do you differ? Do you compromise in order to get along with them and vice versa? (3) Women veiled in the public assemblies. J.T., do you charge them with compromise when they have fellowship with those with whom they disagree? (4) Some say an elder must have a plurality of faithful children. Should they apply Ephesians 5:11 to all brethren who teach that one or more faithful children is scriptural?

We could go on and on but the preceding points show how lopsided brother Smith and some others have become in picking out some of these scenarios over which brother Connie Adams and I disagree and insisting they be made a test of fellowship while ignoring other things that are equally important as far as right and wrong. But I suppose some brethren have to have an issue going lest life gets dull and boring. They don’t understand tolerance and forbearance. Every issue is black or white, right or wrong, truth or error, especially all the particulars and ramifications of all the situations that develop in divorce and remarriage. I guess it must be nice for some brethren to know all the answers about everything, especially on fellowship.

No, brother Smith, letting brotherly love continue does not mean that one skirts around the truth of God or winks at sin in the lives of others. If you can love brethren who differ with you, brother Smith, why can’t I? If you can have respect for those who disagree with you on Sunday night communion, the war question, the covering issue, then why can’t I, including one or two things over which brother Adams and I disagree? Is it all right for you but all wrong for me?

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# Sodom and Gomorrah . . .

## Out of the Ashes

Jesse Flowers

**Then the Lord rained brimstone and fire on Sodom and Gomorrah, from the Lord out of the heavens. So He overthrew those cities, all the plain, all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground (Gen. 19:24-25).**

Long ago, in the days of Abraham, God overthrew these very wicked and corrupt cities. Their sin was “very grave” (Gen. 18:20) in the eyes of Jehovah. The perverse sin they were grossly guilty of was homosexuality (Gen. 19:4-11). A sin against nature itself that God repeatedly and forcefully condemned under both Covenants (Lev. 18:22; 20:13; Rom. 1:26-27; 1 Cor. 6:9-11).

Two countries of the world have very recently taken the place of Sodom and Gomorrah of old. On June 28, Canada’s House of Commons passed legislation to legalize gay marriage. The bill grants same-sex couples the same legal rights as heterosexual couples. The bill is expected to pass the Senate with ease and become federal law by the end of July. Then on June 30, Spanish Parliament legalized gay marriage. The bill that passed by a vote of 187 to 147, allows same-sex couples to adopt children and inherit each others’ property.

Brethren, these are scary times that we live in. I have great anxieties, as you do, for the direction our own country is headed in regard to the legalization of same-sex marriages. Although presently Massachusetts is the only state that allows gay marriages (Vermont and Connecticut have approved same-sex civil unions), many other states have lawmakers and determined citizens who are fighting tooth-and-nail to get laws passed elsewhere to legalize same-sex marriages. Unless there remains a majority who oppose this sinful union, how long will it be before the United States of America legalizes same-sex marriages nationwide? Maybe not in our lifetime, but what about our children and grandchildren? How terrifying that Sodoms and Gomorrah are rising from the ashes all around us!

How true and relevant to our times are the words of the apostle Paul to Timothy. “But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived” (2 Tim. 3:13). Or, as the apostle described those that walk in the ways of Satan, “who, being *past feeling*, have *given themselves* over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness” (Eph. 4:19). How have countries such as the Netherlands, Belgium, Canada, Spain, and even our own country reached this point of depravity? In my opinion, it can be summed up in one word: *toleration*.

*Webster* defines tolerance as: “sympathy or indulgence for beliefs or practices differing from or conflicting with one’s own; the act of allowing something; the allowable deviation from a standard.” There has been a push decade after decade (that I have witnessed even in my own life) for people to become more tolerant to those around them with whom they differ. A person who is not tolerant of another is branded as being a bigot and evil, and soon becomes a social outcast.

Let me point out a few ways that our society has become very tolerant toward some sins that we use to be intolerant of.

1. Our society has become tolerant toward adulterers and fornicators by identifying them as simply “living together.”

2. Rather than condemning sexual immorality and teaching abstinence, our young people are told to practice “safe-sex.”

3. Instead of warning about the serious danger of alcohol consumption, drinkers of wine and beer are told to just “drink responsibly” and if you have had one to many then make sure you have a “designated driver.”

4. Rather than condemn nations and people that contract STDs because of their sexual promiscuity, let us show our

# Teens Matter

Steven F. Deaton

Teenagers may not feel like they have much to contribute to society in general or the cause of Christ specifically. Sometimes they believe their ideas and wishes are neglectfully overlooked or willfully ignored. They may perceive they are not “in the loop” on what is happening or have much influence. While these things may or may not be true, it is a reality to them. Since they have this perception, they may not put forth a great deal of effort in the work of the local church. However, we need to convey to teens that their life is a great benefit to the church.

Young people possess great energy. They may notice older people do not run around as much, stay up as late, or get as worked up as they do. Yet, they may not know why. The reason is because God designed younger people to have more energy. The wise man conveyed this to young men and women when he noted in the days ahead their bodies would wear down (Eccl. 12:1-5). Ask anyone in their sixties, seventies, or eighties and they will tell you they had more energy in their teens and twenties. Young people need to be impressed with their high level of energy and encouraged to use it for good.

Young people also edify older ones. When “seasoned” Christians see teenagers at services, it boosts their spirits.

In part they are buoyed by the enthusiasm of many young people, whether it is by their singing or when young men participate in conducting services. Another part is just to know there are teens who serve the Lord. They are like Timothy in that they have dedicated themselves to God in their youth (2 Tim. 3:14, 15). They have not corrupted themselves with the ways of the world, in drunkenness and lusts (Gal. 5:19-21). They are not fans of Britney Spears, Fifty-cent, or J-Lo. Rather, they respect their parents, love the Lord, and are pure and pious in their daily living (Eph. 6:1-3; 1 Pet. 1:13-16).

We need to encourage younger Christians, as well as those who have yet to obey, by recognizing their goodness. Compliment them on their regular attendance, appropriate attire, cheerful attitude, and respectful disposition. Include them in conversations and ask them their opinions—which can be used for a teaching opportunity. It may help us to remember that younger people are the ones who will step into leadership roles in the future. So, let us do what we can to build them up and prepare them for that great task. Teens matter.

\* Watch for future articles directed to teens.

concern and love for them by sending them millions of dollars to fight the AIDS epidemic.

5. Instead of debating our religious beliefs, we are told to be loving and tolerant of all religions regardless if what they teach is contrary to our beliefs. Let us have a “love-affair with Jesus.”

And then, when you consider what the public has been hearing about homosexuality, even from respected health care providers, it is no surprise that more and more people are becoming tolerant of same-sex marriages. Physicians are telling us it is “normal” if “you feel attracted to someone of the same gender.” And, if you have such feelings that “it is not a bad thing, it is just the way you are.” It is another form of “sexual expression.” Parents are told that if it bothers them that their child is gay, lesbian, or bisexual, then they need to deal with those “negative stereotypes” that they possess. Parents are encouraged to “accept” and “help” their child in dealing with this. “The fact is, *you did not choose* to be gay, bisexual, or straight.” (All quotes come from an

*American Academy of Pediatrics* brochure).

This is the kind of message that society is being fed over and over in print, radio, TV, Internet, news media, children’s books, educational institutions, medical fields, and even religion. With such coverage and support the homosexual agenda has had great success. Many more people have grown “tolerant” of same-sex marriages. That does not mean that they like it a lot or agree with it, but it does mean that they have “accepted it.” They no longer bother with voicing their opinion by speaking out against it. They learned, as countless others have, to just keep their opinions to themselves. Is it any wonder that Sodom and Gomorrah have risen from the smoke and ashes?!

Christian, “stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong” (1 Cor. 16:13). The war is far from over. **Soldiers of Christ arise!**

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# The Spirit of Giving:

## How Can I Give More?" NOT "How Can I Give Less?"

Ron Halbrook

Giving of our financial means on the first day of the week was part of the worship from the beginning of the church. This "fellowship" of giving resulted in a "common" fund or treasury maintained at first by the Apostles and used for the work of the church (Acts 2:42, 44-45; 4:32-47; 6:1-6; 1 Cor. 16:1-2). We should desire to grow in the spirit of giving, asking, "How can I give more?" rather than, "How can I give less?"

### Learning to Give More: "Count Your Blessings"

In the gospel age, God did not legislate any certain amount to give such as a tithe. The Bible is very clear that the gospel of Christ and not the law of Moses is the standard of judgment for us today (John 12:48; Col. 2:14-17). While our giving is not defined by some rigid scale, table, or percentage, our spirit of giving will grow as we meditate on the examples of giving in both the Old and New Testaments. Meditation on the manifold blessings we receive from God will inspire the spirit of giving. Christians who have sufficient daily needs should be ashamed to give less than ten percent when we count our blessings and "name them one by one," as the song "Count Your Blessings" reminds us.

We would do well to learn the spirit of self-sacrifice and to give more than ten percent if possible, even 15, 20, 25 percent or more if possible. It is interesting and challenging to consider that the Jews actually gave much more than ten percent. In addition to the tithe, they also gave animal sacrifices (the best animals, not the sick and lame), food offerings, the gift of the firstborn (which could be redeemed with money), and free-will offerings! It has been computed that the total of their giving was about 30 to 35 percent overall!

We have far greater spiritual blessings than the Jews. In that case, why will we try to rationalize and excuse giving a minimal amount or perhaps nothing at all to show our faith, hope, and love to the Lord? Christians have been given "all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus," yes, "the unsearchable riches of the gospel of

Christ" (Eph. 1:3; 3:8). This was made possible because Christ gave up heaven and sacrificed his life on the cross, i.e., he gave up everything and became poor so that we can have the riches of salvation. "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich" (2 Cor. 8:9).

Each Christian must decide in his own conscience how much to give into the treasury of the church, but our attitude should be, "How can I learn a greater spirit of unselfishness and self-sacrifice, how can I learn to give more, not less?"

### The Spirit of Giving Less: "O Ye of Little Faith"

Frankly, some brethren do not like to hear gospel preaching which addresses the subject of giving. Why? Because some brethren have a selfish, stingy attitude. Some brethren want to know how *few* services they can attend and still get to heaven, rather than seeking to attend *all* of the services so they can grow in faith, hope, and love. Some brethren want to know how *little* time, effort, devotion, money, prayer, and Bible study they can offer to God, rather than how to grow in giving *more* in every way to God. Such weak, carnal brethren might get angry with us when we preach about the true spirit of giving, just like some others who might get angry when we preach about the dangers of worldliness such as drinking alcohol, gambling, fornication, adultery, immodest dress, "and such like" (Gal. 5:19-21).

Why do some Christians get angry when we preach the truth (Gal. 4:16)? It is because they are guilty of the wrong spirit, they are weak in faith, and they are immature in understanding.

Jesus encountered these same problems among his own disciples. That is why he often said to them, "O ye of little faith" (Matt. 6:30; 8:26; 14:31; 16:8; Luke 12:28). Because Jesus loved their souls, he continued patiently teaching them many lessons which they needed to learn. Some murmured at his plain teaching of truth because they

# Is The Bible Open To Different Interpretations?

John Isaac Edwards

(Below is a letter written in response to an article appearing in the Salem newspaper)

Dear Editor:

From the writings I have been reading, many of the citizens in this good community seem to have the notion that the Bible is open to different interpretations. I wonder what book these folks have been reading. When we appeal to the simplicity of Christ (2 Cor. 11:3), there are those who try to escape and evade the force of plain Bible teaching by saying, "That's just your interpretation." What about this? Is anything they say open to different interpretations? It may be so with them, but is it with God? That is the question.

**1. Has anything God ever spake to anyone at any time ever been open to different interpretations?** He-

brews 1:1-2 reveals, "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son." Give us an example of one thing God spake in time past that was open to different interpretations—just one. Was what God said about taking "a censer full of burning coals of fire from off the altar before the Lord" in Leviticus 16:12 open to some other interpretation? If so, why then were Nadab and Abihu devoured by fire for offering "strange fire before the Lord, which he commanded them not" (Lev. 10:1-2)? Was God unrighteous in taking vengeance in such matters (Rom. 3:3-7)? If the will of God was open to different interpretations, he was! What was it that God said that was open to different opinions or understandings? We want an answer to this please. A reading of Nehemiah 8 shows that when the law of God was read distinctly, the people understood it

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said, "This is a hard saying; who can hear it?" Jesus did not apologize for the truth or try to water down the truth, but he tried to persuade them, "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." "From that time many of his disciple went back, and walked no more with him" (John 6:60-66). Other disciples listened and learned. Jesus asked the twelve, "Will ye also go away?" "Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life" (John 6:67-68).

## **"The Truth Shall Make You Free:" Free to Learn the Spirit of Giving**

Yes, we must teach our brethren the spirit of unselfishness, sacrifice, and giving because Jesus said, "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31-32). The truth will make us free from the spirit of selfishness and the sin of stinginess.

We must press on in teaching our brethren the spirit of unselfishness, sacrifice, and giving. We must teach them even when some among them have little faith. We must teach the truth even if some of them become angry. We must teach them because we love their souls and want them to be saved. We must teach them even if some go back to the world because they do not like to hear certain truths. We must teach them because some will continue to listen, to learn, and to grow. "For in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee" (1 Tim. 4:16).

Let us learn to ask, "How can I give more?" rather than, "How can I give less?"

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commonly. Now if they could so understand the law of God given by Moses, why would the law of God by Christ be any different? Surely Christ is as good a lawgiver as Moses! In every form of divine revelation, God has always said what he meant and meant what he said!

**2. Are the rules of sports open to different interpretations?** The very thought is preposterous, and any intelligent sportsman ought to know better! Is the coin toss open to different interpretations? What would you think if two players looked at the coin after it had fallen on the ground and one said, "It's heads," and the other said, "No, it's tails." Then one says, "What difference does it make? You say it's heads; I say it's tails—to you it's heads and to me it's tails—we'll just agree to disagree." Who would be on the receiving end?

**3. Is a doctor's prescription open to different interpretations?** If a psychiatric physician prescribed a twice monthly injection of the anti-psychotic fluphenazine to treat your mania or delusional disorder, would that be open to another interpretation? Why then would the remedy of the Great Physician (Mark 2:17) for the malady of your soul be open to different interpretations? Those who commit homosexuality or are condoners to such, or believe the Bible is open to differing interpretations have "strong delusion" (2 Thess. 2:11), and need an equally strong spiritual anti-psychotic, the gospel of Christ, the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16), and must take it as directed!

If the will of God is open to different interpretations how should New Testament Christians be expected to all speak the same thing, being perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment with no divisions among them (1 Cor. 1:10)? How could they walk by the same rule (Phil. 3:16)?

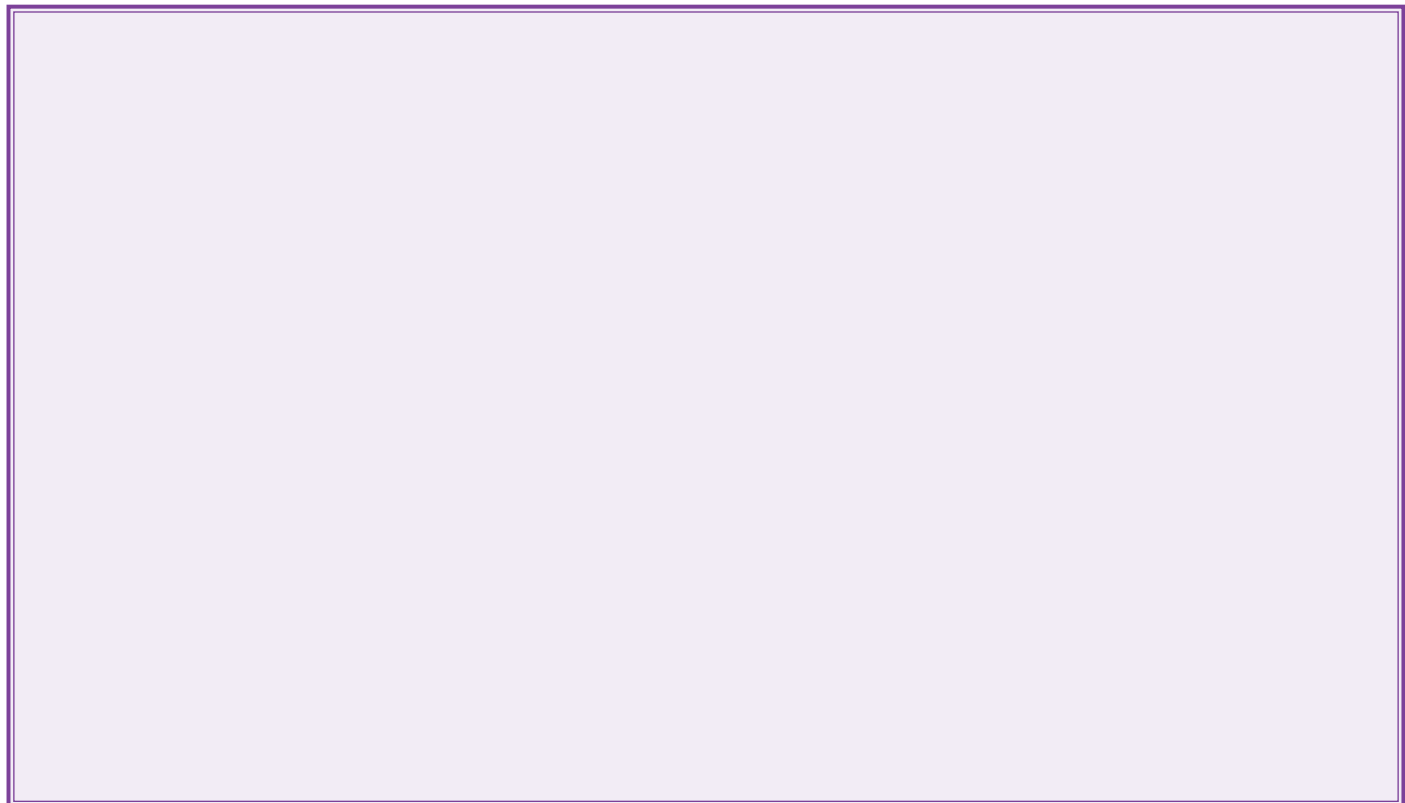
To say the Bible is open to different interpretations is to charge God with not communicating his will clearly and succinctly so that man can commonly understand it. This brings an indictment against the infinite wisdom of the Almighty, and is nothing short of blasphemy!

If the word of God is open to differing interpretations, then the will of God is relative (not absolute) and subjective (peculiar to a particular individual; modified or affected by personal views, experience, or background). How could the Scriptures be wrested or twisted to destruction (2 Pet. 3:16), if the Scriptures are not absolute in their meaning? Why the admonition to rightly divide the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15), if truth is subjective? Why the teaching concerning handling the word of God aright (2 Cor. 4:2), if the will and word of God are peculiar to a particular individual?

Is the Bible open to conflicting, contradicting interpretations? In the wisdom and words of Scripture, "God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar" (Rom. 3:4)!

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# Justification For Homosexuality

Kenneth D. Sils

Rosie O'Donnell is in the news again! I recall watching a show with her last year as she was interviewed on *The O'Reilly Factor*. It was rumored for months that she was gay (homosexual), and she "came out of the closet" in that interview. The purpose of her "coming out" was in an attempt to remove a Florida law which would prohibit "lesbian" couples from adopting children. The statistics are clear: Children have a better chance for a success if they are raised in a two parent (father/mother) environment. Her hope in that interview was to inform the world that homosexuals can make great parents too.

As the interview progressed, Mr. O'Reilly asked if her religious beliefs conflicted with her homosexuality. It appeared that Rosie has some type of belief in Jesus Christ. Based on that faith, Mr. O'Reilly asked her (paraphrased), "When you stand before God in judgment, how will He deal with you being a homosexual?" Immediately, my ears perked up, awaiting for an answer! She spoke so quickly, I didn't catch a direct quote, but it went something like this, "He knows what kind of hell I lived for the first 20 years of my life and he has to be amazed that I am able to love anyone in anyway!" Just what I expected to hear: Jesus must excuse Ms. O'Donnell because she was a victim of a terrible childhood. I'm confident many religious people in America bought that as a justification for her homosexuality. However, I must ask, "Does the Bible justify her homosexuality?"

The apostle Paul reveals God's mind in Romans 1:26-27: "For this reason God gave them up to *vile passions*. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men, committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due." God plainly tells the world that homosexuality, including lesbianism, is shameful and there are penalties that are due to those who are involved. God calls this a "vile" passion or a passion that puts one in a state of disgrace or dishonor. From God's teaching in the New Testament, those who practice homosexuality cannot inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-10)! The Bible is clear: Homosexual activities are sinful

and those who die unrepentant of these unnatural practices will not go to heaven. They will be judged as sinners for sexually immoral folks will "have their part in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone" (Rev. 21:8; 22:15).

Let's now consider the "packaging" of her answer. There are two common attempts she used to justify her sin. First, she lived "a hell on earth" for her first twenty years. Then, because she had it so bad, Jesus must be happy that she can now love somebody or anybody. Based on these two contrived standards, Rosie surmised, "I'm exempt!" Don't people do this all the time with the variety of sins they're now wallowing in? They find some "justification" for why they can practice "vile" passions, some even try to force them down the throat of God himself by saying, "Hey God, you know how bad I have it, you made me this way . . . so, I order you to get over your law and accept me for who I am!"

Friends, you cannot justify sin for sin is not justifiable: no matter how bad you have it, your pain, problems, family situations, creed, culture, race . . . no matter; the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23). If Rosie refuses to change, she will be judged by the word of Jesus (John 12:48). As a matter of biblical fact, all people will be judged by the standard of Jesus' word. So, I have one suggestion: *Repent* (Acts 17:30). Our whole duty in life is to "Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every evil thing, whether good or evil" (Eccl. 12:13-14). Don't try to justify your sin! Do it the Bible way . . . turn away from your sin!

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# All Kind of Prophets

Stan W. Adams

It is obvious, when reading and studying the Old Testament that God utilized the talents of many men of varying backgrounds and temperaments. They all had one thing in common and that was their resolve to say what God told them to say, without fear or favor of men. The young prophet told Jeroboam that, even though he offered him half of his house, he would not go against God's commandments to him (1 Kings 13:8-10). The sad thing is that he was later deceived by an older prophet who had to know better than to lie to the young man. This deception by the older prophet led to the death of the young prophet. God will not tolerate disobedience in his prophets or his people. Punishment and problems accompany disobedience. In this text we have a good prophet and a deceptive prophet. The good prophet became a disobedient prophet when he trusted in the person of the old prophet over God's Word. The same can happen to us today. Paul admonished the Corinthians not to follow after men in 1 Corinthians 1:12-31.

Micaiah was a true prophet of God, who told king Ahab what he needed to hear, even though he was belittled and badgered and disrespected for doing so. Elijah was a prophet with strong language and tactics. Elisha was also very forthright and outspoken. Each of these prophets and others were chosen by God to carry his message to dying men. It is interesting that there does not seem to be any jealousy or party spirit in the lives of the true prophets of God, in the Old Testament or New Testament. Even among the apostles you do not hear of

Andrew being upset because his brother Peter was more prominent than himself. There was respect on the part of all for the role that all played in the furthering of the beautiful message of truth to lost and dying men. Where would God's people be if not for Elijah, John the Baptist, Elisha, Micaiah, Hosea, Jonah, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Daniel, Peter, Andrew, and Thomas? Where would the church be today without outspoken men like, J.D Tant, Roy Cogdill, Jim Cope, Cecil Willis, Connie W. Adams, Ron Halbrook, Tom O'Neal, and others? Each generation must have men who are watchful and wise, who sound the alarms when digressions are beginning. We need to be thankful for those who have these abilities. Although not as prominent, where would we be without Granville Tyler, Sam Binkley, Wiley Adams, Barney Keith, and others who are serving and have served faithfully holding up the "old paths" perhaps in a quieter manner, but just as diligently and just as faithfully as others who may be more prominent. There need be no jealousy on the part of any preacher of the gospel over the abilities that others may possess. Each man who preaches the truth faithfully is seeking to please God and not to impress some party of critics. May all faithful preachers respect all fellow brethren who care for the lost, and for the purity of truth. The younger must respect the older and learn from their wisdom. Be thankful for the wisdom of the older who have fought the battles and know the score!

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## “Factionalism” continued from front page

26:5; 28:22)” [11.50]; (2) the content of teaching which is not true—‘false teaching, untrue doctrine, heresy’ (2 Pet. 2:1)” [33.241]; (3) a division of people into different and opposing sets—‘division, separate group’ (1 Cor. 11:19; Gal. 5:20)” [63.27]; Note: some of these entries and verses may overlap.

Finally, consider the adjective *hairetikos*, also derived from *haireo*, which describes an individual “causing division” (Thomas 141). BDAG say it “pertains to (one, MM) causing divisions, factious, division-making, a division-maker.” This word only occurs in Titus 3:10, where it is translated “anyone who causes divisions” (NRSV), “divisive man” (NKJV), “divisive person” (NIV), “factious man” (ASV; “NASB95), “heretick” (KJV), “person who stirs up division” (ESV), “someone who causes arguments” (NCV), and “troublemakers” (CEV).

## Choosing Between Obedience and Rebellion

As creatures of choice, we must choose between obedience and rebellion. Adam and Eve chose to disobey God’s commandment, and suffered death as a result (Gen. 2:15-17; 3:6-7). Others demonstrated more wisdom. Remember the faith and foresight of Moses (Heb. 11:24-26). Ruth chose to accompany Naomi when she returned to Bethlehem, saying, “Do not urge me to leave you or turn back from following you; for where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried” (Ruth 1:14-18).

Men make different choices concerning Christ Jesus. Realizing the demands of discipleship, many withdrew and no longer walked with Jesus; in contrast, Peter and the other apostles chose to follow Christ: “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life” (John 6:66-68). On the day of Pentecost, three thousand individuals chose to obey the gospel, while others chose continued rebellion (Acts 2:36-47).

## Lincoln’s Last Appointment

Larry Ray Hafley

It was the evening of April 14. The President was running late. Though besieged by last minute callers, it was partly his fault (he had delayed dinner reading humorous articles to a few friends). As he finally prepared to leave, he saw an old friend, George Ashmun, with whom he had served in Congress nearly twenty years before. Accompanied by the Speaker of the House and Judge Daly, George could not be refused. Lincoln spent a few minutes with them. Again, an appeal was made for him to come to the carriage. They were already late. Hastily, the President “scribbled on a card for Ashmun and Judge Daly: ‘Allow Mr. Ashmun & friend to come in at 9 A.M. tomorrow. A. Lincoln April 14, 1865’” Luthin, *Lincoln* 633).

It was rainy and overcast at 9 A.M. the next day. The appointment would never be kept. Lincoln was dead.

How many of us innocently make similar plans and appointments, never considering that we might not keep them? The rich man in Luke 12:15-21 gave no thought that he might die. He designed and declared his future which he fully expected to enjoy “for many years.” However, the Lord said, “This night thy soul shall be required of thee,” *this night, you shall die!* Then, what?

“Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow, we shall go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage

in business and make a profit.’ Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we shall live and also do this or that’” (Jas. 4:13-15).

No, it is not wrong to make plans for the future. The Lord and the apostles did so (1 Cor. 16:5-8; 2 Cor. 1:15, 16). However, as Paul said, we must make appointments with the sure and certain knowledge that they will be kept “*if the Lord permit.*” One day, our future appointments will be canceled, not merely postponed. A holiday which we are looking forward to with great anticipation will be kept without us. A meeting will be set, but we will not attend. Another meeting will be set, but I will not preach it.

Forty-seven years later, at almost the same hour Lincoln was shot, the world’s greatest luxury liner steamed toward New York with its elite cargo of the sophisticated debutantes of the day. Ahead, on the placid, mirror finished ocean surface, there floated an iceberg.

Once again, appointments of April 14 would never be kept. Dreams and schemes would vanish as the vapor of that cold night. April 15 would find their souls in eternity. And you? What are your plans for tomorrow?

Because each accountable individual has ratified Adam's rebellion, all mankind stand guilty before God, needing the salvation that comes through Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:9-24; 5:12-14). As creatures of choice, we must choose between life and death (Deut. 30:19-20), the Lord and idols (Josh. 24:14-15; 1 Kings 18:20-21), God and mammon (Matt. 6:24; Luke 16:13). Instead of choosing the fear of the Lord—with its attendant blessing (Prov. 1:7-9), many choose the folly of sin—with its inescapable curse (Prov. 1:29-31). Men must choose between the wages of sin, which is death, and the free gift of God, which is eternal life (Rom. 6:16-19). Since eternity hangs in the balance, let us choose obedience (Heb. 5:8-9).

### Choosing Between True and False Unity

As creatures of choice, we must choose between true and false unity. First century Judaism was not a unified and harmonious whole, but was rent asunder by sectarianism. Subdivisions included the sect of the Pharisees (Acts 15:5), the Sadducees (Acts 5:17), the Herodians (Matt. 22:16), Zealots (Luke 6:15), and Essenes (see the *Dead Sea Scrolls* and Josephus), etc. Modern day denominationalism also includes many distinctive bodies: Baptist, Charismatic/Pentecostal, Episcopal, Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, etc.

Was this diverse state desirable? Modern man would answer, "Yes! Celebrate diversity. Worship in the church of your choice, or if so inclined, not at all." However, Scripture answers otherwise. The divisions of Judaism destroyed the precious unity that would have otherwise characterized God's chosen people (Ps. 133:1-3). Modern day denominationalism destroys the unity for which Christ prayed (John 17:19-23).

Doctrinal disagreements which distinguished one group from another were rooted, not in Scripture itself, but in human tradition and sectarian dogma. In the first century, the Pharisees bound human opinion regarding the washing of hands (Matt. 15:1-9; Mark 7:1-8), while the Sadducees rejected divine revelation regarding angels and the resurrection (Matt. 22:23-33; Acts 23:6-10). Today, the fault lines of division are reflected in the doctrinal distinctives of various religious groups.

Is it possible to achieve unity in a sectarian environment? Only two possibilities exist: Men can lay aside error and unite on the truth, or they can lay aside the truth and unite on error. Sadly, many brethren today are drifting toward the latter position. No longer believing that truth is knowable, their preaching is more and more speculative, less and less scriptural. Let us not be tempted by such tentativeness: Truth has been revealed (John 1:14, 17; 8:31-32; 14:6). God's word is understandable (John 7:16-17; Eph. 3:1-5; 5:15-17). Heaven's message will judge us in the last day (John 12:48; Rev. 20:11-12).

Truth and error cannot harmoniously coexist (Jer. 23:28-32; 2 Cor. 6:14-18). Truth alone sanctifies (John 17:17-19). Biblical unity is based on mutual conformity to the will of God (Eph. 4:1-6, 11-16). Therefore, casting aside human doctrines/opinions, let us unite upon a "Thus saith the Lord."

### Choosing Between Schism and Heresy

As creatures of choice, we must understand the relationship between schism and heresy. Last year, the "Right Reverend" Peter J. Lee, Episcopal bishop of Virginia, chided church conservatives for imperiling the unity of the country's largest diocese over the ordination of the denomination's first homosexual bishop. In a speech before 500 Episcopalians meeting for the annual diocesan council in Reston, Virginia, Lee said, "If you must make a choice between heresy and schism, always choose heresy." "For as a heretic, you are only guilty of a wrong opinion," Bishop Lee said, quoting Presbyterian scholar James McCord. "As a schismatic, you have torn and divided the body of Christ. Choose heresy every time" (WT).

Unfortunately, some of our brethren share the same mind set. Based upon a perversion of Romans 14, Ed Harrell and men of like persuasion would preserve fellowship with purveyors of error. Those who object to this course are accused of manufacturing a needless controversy, and fostering an unnecessary division. Contemporary compromisers embrace heresy to avoid schism. However, they have reversed reality. The promotion of heresy causes schism. Not vice versa.

Brethren stand apart and the gospel is hindered when divine instruction is supplanted by unauthorized human doctrines (Rom. 16:17-19). The Greek word *dichostasia*, i.e., "dissensions," which appears in this context and is also listed among the works of the flesh in Galatians 5:20, refers to "the state of being in factious opposition" (BDAG). In like manner, the Greek word *skandalon*, here translated "hindrances" and elsewhere "stumbling block(s)" (Matt. 18:7; Luke 17:1), etc., refers to "a stick for bait (of a trap), generally a snare" (Thomas 4625). Balaam and Jezebel well illustrate the danger of sinful compromise (Rev. 2:14-16; 2:20-23).

In writing to the Corinthians, Paul said, "For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that divisions (*schisma*) exist among you; and in part I believe it. For there must also be *factions* (*haireisis*) among you, so that those who are approved may become evident among you" (1 Cor. 11:18-19).

In like manner, John said, "They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us" (1 John 2:19).

Unjustifiable factionalism existed at Corinth: There should have been no party of Paul, Cephas, or Apollos since they were guided by inspiration to teach the same thing. Laying aside pettiness and all manifestations of a party spirit, the Corinthians should demonstrate the same love one for another (1 Cor. 1:10-12; 3:1-4; 11:18-22; 12:20-26).

When men have differing attitudes toward Jesus Christ (John 7:40-44, esp. v. 43; 9:13-16, esp. v. 16; 10:19-21), or the gospel message (Acts 14:1-7, esp. v. 4), division is unavoidable. Discord inevitably occurs when men add to, subtract from or change the inspired message of truth (Deut. 4:1-2; 12:32; Prov. 30:5-6; Matt. 15:1-9; Gal. 1:6-9; Col. 2:20-23; Tit. 1:13-14; Rev. 22:18-19; etc.).

Christ Jesus possesses all authority (Matt. 28:18-20). Through the agency of the Holy Spirit, the apostles were given perfect remembrance of all that Jesus taught during his earthly ministry (John 14:25-26). Subsequently, they were guided to all the truth (John 16:12-13). As a result, they accurately proclaimed heaven's message: binding all that God had previously bound, loosing where he had loosed (Matt. 16:16-19).

Men often turn aside from the ways of God. In the first century, the Pharisees—religious conservatives—bound human opinion regarding the washing of hands, while the Sadducees—religious liberals—rejected divine revelation regarding angels and the resurrection. So likewise, today truth is under assault from all directions. Some turn aside to the right hand of legalism, binding where God has loosed. Some turn aside to the left hand of liberalism, loosing where God has bound.

### Some Choose the Right Hand

Some turn aside to the right hand, binding where God has loosed. Faithful brethren agree regarding the symbolism and significance of the Lord's supper (1 Cor. 11:23-26). They are united regarding its frequency (Acts 20:7). However, division occurs when men bind their opinions regarding the container (i.e., mandating one cup vs. multiple containers).

On the issue of marriage, divorce and remarriage, faithful brethren agree that Matthew 19:9 applies to saint and sinner alike. Faithful brethren agree that Jesus allowed one exception regarding divorce and remarriage: "except for immorality/fornication." However, brethren frequently differ regarding civil procedure. Why? Because Scripture does not focus on *procedure* (civil or otherwise), but rather upon the *cause* of the sundering of a union. Unfortunately, fellowship among like-minded brethren is being imperiled today by those who would bind their opinion regarding divorce procedure and foster division over an issue that is not specifically addressed in Scripture.

We can agree upon the things that God has revealed. However, we differ regarding the secret things, i.e., things that are not revealed (cf. Deut. 29:29). When addressing such matters, humility trumps haughty self-assertiveness: "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor?" (Rom. 11:33-34; cf. Isa. 40:12-14).

In writing to the Corinthians, Paul asked, "For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he will instruct Him?" Man cannot intuitively know God's mind. Apart from revelation, we are without guidance. However, with revelation comes insight and understanding. Thanks be to God: "But we have the mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:11-16).

In matters of revelation, where divine truth is clearly set forth (1 Cor. 2:12-13), let us boldly wield the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17-20). In matters of opinion, let us be cautious and considerate (Rom. 14:10-13). Remember the declaration of Thomas Campbell: "In matters of faith, unity; in matters of judgment, liberty; in all things, charity."

### Others Choose the Left Hand

Some turn aside to the left hand, loosing where God has bound. Brother Ed Harrell, in his extended series on the bounds of Christian fellowship, appearing first in *Christianity Magazine* and subsequently reprinted, sought to extend fellowship to Homer Hailey whose teaching on marriage, divorce and remarriage violated the clear declaration of Scripture. More than fifteen years later, we ask, "What other errors will be similarly defended and justified?"

Those who accept a looser view of fellowship will ultimately tolerate far more than one man's erroneous teaching on one subject. Consider the subsequent compromises regarding the days of Genesis 1, the serpent of Genesis 3, the worldwide flood of Genesis 6-9, questioning the authenticity of 2 Peter and Jude, etc. Leading brethren have counseled toleration of such views. Where does it all end? In today's environment of moral and doctrinal relativism, what biblical truth is sacrosanct (Jer. 5:30-31; Isa. 10:3)?

### Conclusion

Truth and error do not mix. Jesus said, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you will know the *truth*, and the *truth* will make you free" (John 8:31-32). Paul said, "For our exhortation does not come from *error* or *impurity* or by way of *deceit*; but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who examines our hearts" (1 Thess. 2:3-4).

Herein lies a paradox: If others choose error, and we choose truth, division is desirable (1 Cor. 11:18-19). How-



ever, if others choose truth, and we choose error, division is damnable (2 Pet. 2:1-3).

Therefore, let us choose the old paths (Jer. 6:16-19) and contentedly walk in the way of Jesus (Matt. 7:13-14; John 14:6). Though others may slanderously call it a sect, let us walk in the revealed way (Acts 24:14-16), maintaining a praiseworthy attitude both toward fellow Christians and also the faithful word (Eph. 4:1-6; Tit. 1:9-13).

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BDAG = Frederick William Danker, ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2000).

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NASB95 = Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations come from *New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update* (La-Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995).

Thomas = Robert L. Thomas, *New American Standard Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek Dictionaries: Updated Edition* (Anaheim: Foundation Publications, Inc., 1998, 1981).

WT = Julia Duin, "Heresy Better Idea Than Schism?" *The Washington Times [Online Edition]*, (January 31, 2004).

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## “Unity” continued from page 2

In contrast to this, there is a category of things that are essential. Paul could not tolerate those false teachers who denied that Jesus was raised from the dead (1 Cor. 15:12-19) or those who said that the resurrection is already past (1 Tim. 1:18-19; 2 Tim. 2:14-18). Paul could not tolerate, not even for one hour, those brethren who made circumcision and the keeping of the Law of Moses a condition for salvation (Gal. 2:1-12; 5:1-4). There are many other matters of divine revelation which are specifically mentioned as matters on which brethren must agree in order to maintain their fellowship, because they are likewise essential to one’s salvation.

(As an aside, let me acknowledge that, while there is agreement that the “doctrine of Christ” is non-negotiable, there always will be Christians at every level of maturity in the local congregation. For example, the church at

Corinth had within its membership some who had recently converted from paganism who did not fully understand that there was but one God (1 Cor. 8:7—“howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge. . .”); some who did not understand God’s teaching on marriage and divorce (1 Cor. 7); some who did not understand the role of women (1 Cor. 11:1-16; 14:34-34); and a host of other problems. Whereas Paul would not tolerate a false teacher, he worked with these immature saints to bring them to greater maturity.)

### Two Patterns of Fellowship

There are two patterns of fellowship revealed in Scripture. One is revealed in 2 John 9-11.

Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.

This text requires Christians to be in agreement on the doctrine of Christ and forbids receiving into fellowship those who are false teachers.

We are troubled today by some who make essential matters indifferent. Those who make essential matters indifferent have an ecumenical approach to fellowship. Protestant churches are in a state of turmoil today because some want to make homosexuality a matter of indifference and others make it a condition of fellowship; the issue is tearing apart their respective denominations.

The second pattern of fellowship is discussed in 1 Corinthians 8-10 and Romans 14 where Paul addresses non-essentials, matters of indifference. On these he commanded that brethren be tolerant of one another, not allowing matters of divine liberty to divide them. He writes,

Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations. For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him. Who art thou that judgest another man’s servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand. One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. . . . Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God (Rom. 14:1-5; 15:7).

On issues of personal liberty, Christians were never to allow their fellowship to be broken. There was no attitude that said, “Give him time to study these issues. He will come around.” The implication was never left that, if the



person did not come around, he should be disfellowshipped. These matters of indifference should never be made a test of fellowship, regardless of how many years may pass during which brethren disagree.

### The Difficult Task

The problem for children of God is the problem of distinguishing between those things which are essentials and those which are non-essentials. Ultimately every issue must come down to a discussion of whether the matter falls into the category of things that are essential or things that are indifferent. This may be distasteful to some of our readers, but nevertheless, this seems to be the case.

Paul recognized that men would need to study to be able to distinguish the things that differ. He wrote, "For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ. And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; That ye may approve things that are excellent (*diapheronta*); that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ" (Phil. 1:8-10).

The word "excellent" is translated from *diapheronta*. It is present participle of the verb *diaphero* which means, in this context, "differ, be different." Arndt and Gingrich define the word as follows: "*ta diapheronta*, the things that really matter (opp. to *adiapheronta*)" (189). One must grow in his spiritual maturity to be able to distinguish the essentials from the non-essentials as he faces the various issues of our respective cultures.

Let's make some application. Some brethren and churches want to make indifferent what Jesus taught about divorce in Matthew 19:9, being tolerant of those doctrines taught by the late brother Homer Hailey, Olan Hicks, Glen Lovelady, and Jerry Bassett. Others want to make every aspect of the divorce decree a matter of the "doctrine of Christ." Here are some matters of personal judgment which are being made tests of salvation and fellowship:

- if one believes that one can remarry even though the legal papers do not say "for fornication"
- if he believes that the innocent party can remarry even though he does not initiate the legal papers in a divorce,
- if he believes that the innocent party can remarry so long as he counter sues
- if he believes that the innocent party has the right to remarriage in a divorce where the person counter sued but the judge awards the divorce to the guilty party; etc.

The brother who believes these things is often stigmatized with the charge of "mental divorce," a term stemming from the old "waiting game" idea but which has become

a catch-all phrase for all sorts of differences in judgments and opinions. Those judged guilty of "mental divorce" are treated as violating the "doctrine of Christ" (2 John 9-11). That some brethren have become factional about "mental divorce" is evident from how they treat the issue. So long as one is right on "mental divorce," he is accepted into fellowship even if he also accepts into fellowship those who have taught what brother Hailey, Olan Hicks, Glen Lovelady, and Jerry Bassett teach on divorce and remarriage. (Go figure out that one!) I cite these examples to show that we have not mastered the plea: "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials liberty; in all things love." I would like to examine the thesis of this maxim in the next several issues.

May each Christian resolve to grow so that he may be qualified to make the distinctions between the essentials and the non-essentials.

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## Quips & Quotes

### Disciples of Christ Elect 1st Female President

"Portland, Oregon — Disciples of Christ became the first major U.S. Protestant denomination to elect a woman as its leader Tuesday.

"More than 3,000 church delegates stood to register their 'Yes' vote for the Rev. Sharon E. Watkins. When no one rose to vote against her, the room erupted in applause.

"The 770,000 member denomination, headquartered in Indianapolis, counts former Presidents Ronald Reagan and Lyndon Johnson among its past members (*The Indianapolis Star* [July 27, 2005], A6).

### Evangelical Lutherans Reject Gays as Clergy

"Orlando, Fla. — A national meeting of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America rejected a proposal Friday that would have allowed gays in committed relationships to serve as clergy under certain conditions.

"The measure would have affirmed the church ban on ordaining sexually active gays and lesbians, but would have allowed bishops and church districts called synods to seek an exception for a particular candidate—if that person was in a long-term relationship and met other restrictions.

"Delegates voted against the measure 503-490. Even if it had won a simple majority of votes, that wouldn't have been enough; the proposal needed a two-thirds majority to pass.

“Earlier, delegates voted 851-127 to keep the church unified despite serious differences over homosexuality. They also rebuffed what many saw as an attempt to push the denomination toward approval of blessing ceremonies for same-sex couples.

“. . . In a news conference immediately after the vote, Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson said he hoped gays and lesbians did not take the vote as a sign they were not welcome in the 4.0 million-member church.

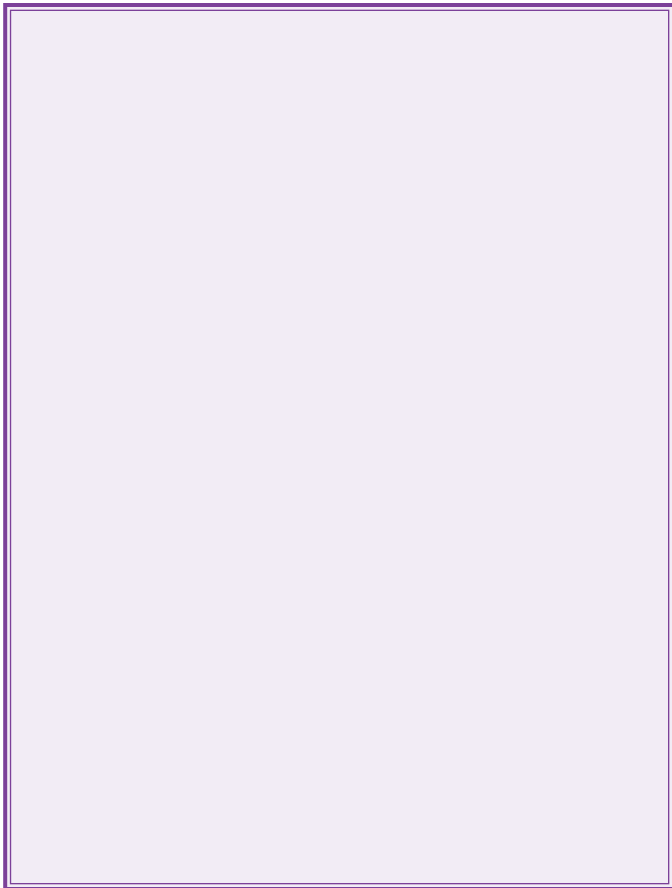
“They are. We have said that publicly and clearly,’ he said” (*The Indianapolis Star* [August 13, 2005], A10).

### **Bush: “Intelligent Design” Should be Taught, Too**

“Washington — President Bush said Monday he believes schools should discuss ‘intelligent design’ alongside evolution when teaching students about the creation of life.

“During an interview with reporters from five Texas newspapers, Bush declined to go into detail on his personal views of the origin of life. But he said students should learn about both theories.

“The theory of intelligent design says life on earth is too complex to have developed through evolution, implying that a higher power must have had a hand in creation” (*The Indianapolis Star* [August 2, 2005], A3).



### **If All The World Were Christians**

Have you ever stopped to wonder  
What a great world this would be,  
If all the world were Christians,  
As our dear Lord prayed they'd be?

There'd be no need to lock our doors,  
No one would rob or steal;  
There'd be no drunken drivers,  
And no dope fiends at the wheel.

“What kind of friends will my child choose?”  
Would never cross our minds.  
Because in a world of Christians,  
There would be but just one kind.

“War” would be an unheard word;  
No one would kill another;  
There's be no envy, strife, or greed;  
Each man would be our brother.

We'd have no need for welfare checks;  
All able men would labor;  
And he who couldn't care for self  
Would be cared for by his neighbor

This ideal state—Utopia  
Is just a dream I guess;  
But sinner friend, if you'd obey,  
There would be one sinner less!

Fay Mobley

### **Preacher Needed**

**Beckley, West Virginia:** The Carriage Drive church in Beckley is searching for a mature, scripturally sound evangelist to work with them. They would prefer a middle aged man with a family, but will consider others. The church in Beckley is a well established body of God's people. They have a four-bedroom house on church property and a comfortable meeting house, both paid for. They are fully self supporting. Beckley is located on Interstate 64 and 77, is a high tourist area with lots of recreational facilities and nature's beauty nearby. Beckley is a fast growing city with many restaurants and shopping areas and more on the way. Beckley is a city of 20,000 plus. If interested, please contact Leonard Bragg, 304-252-3223, lcbagg@charter.net, Brian Baker, 304-255-0694, brbaker@charter.net, Tom Wilson, 304-877-2359, trj345@charter.net, or Alan Rich, 304-253-0318, gabby@fortunehitech.net.



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