

Banner of Truth

"The truth shall make you free." (John 8:32)

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“HANDLING ARIGHT THE WORD OF TRUTH”

God’s approval of man is contingent on handling the word of truth properly. A failure to do so brings shame on man and God’s disapproval, ruling out blessings in this life, and in eternity.

The apostle Paul instructs Timothy, his son in the gospel, with regard to some soul-saving matters. “Handl[ing] aright the word of truth” is a part of those instructions which are recorded in his second letter to Timothy, beginning with chapter two. In verse 14 of that second chapter, Paul tells Timothy: “Of these things put them in remembrance.” Those general instructions applied to brethren generally, as they do to us now.

Our title (2Tim. 2:15) is an oft-quoted verse; but, in many instances we do not glean all the meanings therein. The whole verse is: “Give diligence to present thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, handling aright the word of truth.”

Let us note first,

I. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE WORD OF TRUTH.

What is “the word of truth”? It is God’s word, not the word of men. To His disciples, Christ once said, “Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth...” (Jno.

16:13). Then in the Lord’s prayer to the Father, Jesus prayed for his disciples saying, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth” (Jno. 17:17). God’s word, the truth, is that about which Christ spoke to those Jews which believed: “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” (Jno. 8:31-32).

Those who would reap the rich blessings, which are available through God’s word, must make sure that what they have embraced as truth is the real truth and not some pseudo truth which has been concocted by man. In many instances, what is error is paraded as truth.

The pagan religions have something which is claimed to be truth, but it could not be because it upholds that which is contrary to God’s truth. Islam, for example, claims to have the truth in the Koran, but that so-called truth instructs its adherents to murder those whom they call infidels. In so many ways their so-called truth is diametrically opposed to God’s word. →

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Christ warns that promoting manmade truth nullifies our worship: "But in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Matt. 15:9).

Among those who claim to be Christians, there are those who attach meanings to passages which God never intended. Paul reminds the Galatian brethren of those who would believe in "another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ" (Gal. 1:6-7). There are multiplied doctrines taught by religious people which are perversions of God's truth and will bring spiritual destruction.

There is a need to use the most reliable of the versions of the Bible. False doctrines are quite often injected into unreliable versions leading people to believe things which are not true. God's word does not have to be changed wholesale to render it invalid; just a few false words can adulterate a large amount of truth. D-con, a deadly bait for rats and mice, makes for

a common analogy: Though its contents are ninety-nine percent good grain, it becomes deadly when one percent of warfarin is added.

Those within the Lord's true church should be careful that what they hear from the preacher or teacher is the undiluted truth. In view of the many warnings concerning false teachers, one leaves himself open to accepting error unless, like the Bereans, he "...receive[s] the word with all readiness of mind, and search[e]s the scriptures daily, whether those things [are] so" (Acts 17:11). Even in "our schools," students should make sure what they are taught is the truth. Most would come nearer accepting false doctrine when sitting at the feet of those who are our brethren, than if it were someone who is not a member of the church. More than any time during our lives, the Lord's church is today infested with false teachers.

We must also be concerned with,

II. HANDLING ARIGHT THE WORD

Whereas the KJV says, "rightly dividing," the ASV uses the phrase "handling aright," which perhaps better captures the idea at hand. People sometimes think the notion is that of being able to separate some truth from other truth, but this is not the idea. THAYER says the Greek word means: "1. *to cut straight*, to cut straight ways, i.e., to proceed by straight paths, hold a straight course, equiv. to do right. 2. *dropping the idea of cutting, to make straight and smooth*;...i.e. to teach the truth correctly and directly (2 Tim. 2:15)." This term then means to teach God's word correctly, as it applies to all of His word.

The fact that we are to "handle aright" the word of truth, implies that it could be mishandled. We often see the mishandling of important things in this life. People mishandle their finances and suffer for it. People mishandle their abilities to do positive and worthwhile things. A mishandling of one's health may well bring on pain, suffering, even death. These things are very important, but in no sense of the term do they compare with the mishandling of the truth, which makes men free and provides a living hope of a home in heaven. There are many warnings with regard to how we handle the truth and the benefits or losses involved. †

Handling God's word in the correct way involves both positives and negatives. Handling it aright brings spiritual strength and growth, whereas failure to do so brings about spiritual weakness, even spiritual death and destruction. Handling the word properly rules out teaching only part of God's word and excluding the rest. This would include the Old Testament as well as the New. Paul said, "For whatsoever things were written afore time were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope" (Rom. 15:4). Sometimes preachers and teachers avoid subjects which might step on toes. They do not want to hurt anyone's feelings, notwithstanding the fact that when we fail to handle aright God's word we are hurting our Lord's feelings. Handling the truth aright includes both meat and milk of the word, which are necessary to bring about proper spiritual growth. The milk-only diet, which too many are on, is sure to bring about spiritual malnourishment.

Personal intensity and focus are a part of handling aright God truth, as seen in the,

III. IMPORTANCE OF GIVING DILIGENCE

The KJV says "study," but not in the sense we often think of it. The ASV translates: "give diligence." Diligence includes the ideas of: zeal, effort, desire and haste. Since it is directly connected to our having God's approval, we can surley see why we should be diligent in the matter. Having God's approval determines our eternal destiny. No one lacking God's approval should even think of the great and eternal blessings in store for the faithful servant.

We can see then that more is involved in having God's approval than just to "study" God's word, but of course that is involved. The fact that Paul identifies the approved person as a "workman" shows that continued effort is involved. So many times in the New Testament reference is made to our work in the sense of doing that which is pleasing to God. James says, "Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only" (Jas. 2:24); and, "But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?" (v. 20). Christ himself emphasizes diligence: "I must works the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh when no man can work" (Matt. 9:4). Jesus, of

course, did not need to "study," as we do, to learn God's will, but He did realize the urgency of giving attention to those things which he had to do during his remaining time. It is certainly imperative that we follow Christ's example, if we are to have the Father's approval.

We must also strive to be,

IV. A WORKMAN THAT NEEDETH NOT TO BE ASHAMED

The Greek word here translated "ashamed" is used only this one time in the New Testament. THAYER says the word means: *having no cause to be ashamed.*" That is, no cause to be ashamed before God. The workman who skimps in his work has reason to be ashamed; he is being dishonest, purloining; and so is the man who skimps in his work for the Lord. Peter points out that "...if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf" (I Pet. 4:16). We should never be ashamed to let people know that we are Christians, and we should never be ashamed when God's word is spoken. We should never be ashamed for standing for God's truth, even when it brings persecution, and speaking the truth does bring it. We sing a beautiful hymn which captures the idea of pride in our Lord and our work for Him: "I'm Not Ashamed to Own My Lord." Such pride is also included in the lyrics of the first line: "...Nor to defend His cause."

Only the Lord knows how much hurt is being brought to bear upon His church today because our actions so often render us guilty of shame. Our society today is being overflowed by the influence of those who do not believe in God, and who are seeking to remove every vestige of God's influence from us. It is frightening to think of the pernicious inroads the ungodly are making.

How sad it will be in the Day of Judgment for those who have lived before God in such a way as to bring shame upon themselves. It is indeed time to wake up, but many have been so overcome by a spirit of indifference that they are not likely to be awakened while there is time and opportunity.

A diligent and proud workman must also give attention to, →

V. THINGS WE SHOULD SHUN

Paul says, “shun profane and vain babblings” (2 Tim. 1:16). VINE defines profane as: “that which lacks all relationship or affinity to God.” So much of present day communication is replete with words, phrases, and ideas which show disrespect, even disdain, for God. We are faced with this threat from children to adults. Television, which has a great influence upon people, especially children, is a conveyor belt of evil. Moral standards are fast disappearing in the areas of: speech, dress, and principles. Human sexuality has become so perverted that many people live and act as beasts of the field. The tragic thing is that so many simply do not care about things of importance.

“Babblings,” VINE says, means: “empty discussion, discussion of useless subjects.” Could it be that we are sometimes guilty of this very thing? That is, we may spend much time talking about things which amount to nothing, rather than speech that is filled with something worthwhile. I have known people that seldom seemed to have a serious thought about anything. To some people, virtually everything is a joke. I have often thought of what we usually talk about before and after church services. Much of the time we spend talking about things which have nothing whatsoever to do with spiritual things. An indelible memory comes to mind. Years ago, in Hualien, Taiwan, my son-in-law and I, were in a gospel meeting with the brethren. We were, after service one evening, treated to a snack at McDonald’s. Right in the middle of our hamburgers, one of the Chinese sisters opened her Bible placed it on the counter and began to ask some serious questions; one being the meaning of the terms in Joel’s prophecy cited in Acts chapter two. They seemed to be so eager to learn, that they did not want to waste any time and opportunity, even at McDonald’s.

Vain babblings are profane. They will lead people away from God rather than to Him. Paul says, “for they will proceed further in ungodliness.” (v. 16). We are warned of many things which lead people away from the truth; this is one of them. Let us note then,

VI. AN EXAMPLE OF “FURTHER IN UNGODLINESS”

Paul, citing two examples, shows us where profane babblings will “further” lead: “And their word will eat as doth a gangrene: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus” (v. 17). What had these two men done? They were men “who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is passed already, and overthrow the faith of some” (v. 18).

In our day, there are many, who like Hymenaeus and Philetus, have erred from the truth. A case in point is the Max King doctrine, which says the judgment has already happened.

In the matter of worship, which is to be according to our Lord’s instruction, many have erred. Whereas Christ says, “God is a spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (Jno. 4:24), men in many cases have made worship a period of entertainment, even to the point that some are using instrumental music. There has been a movement away from what pleases God to what pleases man.

Another area where men have erred from the truth is in the realm of fellowship. God has a law on fellowship, but it is being ignored right and left as brethren are fellowshiping man-made churches, and people with all manner of false doctrines.

CONCLUSION

There is nothing that matches in importance, the top priority of seeking God’s approval. The “Just One,” has been so good to man giving him the ability to choose to follow Him. Along with the ability to choose, the essential instructions for living in such a way as to have God’s approval have been provided in His word.

What greater example of an approved workman can we find than that of Paul? He came to the end saying, “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith” (2 Tim. 4:7). His reward for having done so was expressed in clear terms: “Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness.”

— Editor

TRINITY UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

Some have been confused by the appellation: “United Church of Christ.” This denomination has no relationship to the church of Christ, which is found in the New Testament and spoken of by the prophets in the Old Testament.

The denomination, United Church of Christ, has received added attention in recent times, due to the fact that Barack Hussein Obama, who is running for President of the U.S., is a member of this group. The *Trinity* United Church of Christ has reference to an even yet particular denominational body which is located in Chicago, Illinois. There are a number of congregations of the United Church of Christ; Trinity United Church of Christ is one of them.

Some reports concerning Barack Hussein Obama may have been inaccurate, but what we are discussing with regard to Mr. Obama and the Trinity United Church of Christ comes from their own website.

According to “Rev. Dr. Jeremiah A. Wright, Jr., Senior Pastor of Trinity United Church of Christ,” the Trinity congregation has a membership of over 8,000, and “over 70 ministries,” including a “Dance Ministry.”

The Trinity website makes clear that it is strictly a “black church.” The church is described by their “motto” as follows: “We are a congregation which is Unashamedly Black and Unapologetically Christian.” The website interchangeably uses the terms “black” and “afrocentric” in describing their activities, view, creeds and so on. The site speaks of: “African heritage”; “Center for African Bible Studies”; “Our roots in the black religious experience”; “Black community”; “Black Power”; “Black Theology”; “Black liberation theology”; “African-centered thought”; and, “the African-American culture” is used several times.

The material I received by way of the Trinity website contains the photos of quite a number of people, including a chorus. There seemed to be no white people present. Time after time the emphasis is upon the promotion of the black African culture.

Under the heading: THE BLACK VALUE SYSTEM, is the following information — “Trinity United Church of Christ adopted the Black Value System, written by the Manford Byrd Recognition Committee, chaired by the late Vallmer Jordan in 1981.” The strong emphasis upon the promotion of the Black Value System is set forth under 12 headings which appear below. It is said of these 12 things: “These Black Ethics must be taught and exemplified in homes, churches, nurseries and schools, wherever Blacks are gathered.” They consist of the following concepts:

1. Commitment to God.
2. Commitment to the Black Community.
3. Commitment to the Black Family.
4. Dedication to the Pursuit of Education.
5. Dedication to the Pursuit of Excellence.
6. Adherence to Black Work Ethic.
7. Commitment to Self-Discipline.
8. Disavowal of the Pursuit of “Middleclassness”
9. Pledge to make the fruits of all developing and required skills available to the Black Community.
10. Pledge to Allocate Regularly, a Portion of Personal Resources for Strengthening and Supporting Black Institutions.
11. Pledge allegiance to all Black leadership who espouse and embrace the Black Value System.
12. Personal commitment to embracement of the Black Value System.

The reader will have noted that each item — some noble and worthwhile ones — is characterized as “black.”

WHY THE CONCERN ABOUT THE TRINITY UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST OF WHICH BARACK HUSSEIN OBAMA IS A MEMBER?

In the first place, the concept of an “all black,” — not to mention “all white” — church is foreign to God’s will. The church which Christ built and purchased by His blood (Acts 20:28) is comprised of those from all tribes, tongues, and nations who obey God.

Mr. Obama’s church, the Trinity United Church of Christ, fosters and encourages racial identity and division. Right thinking people have been decrying racism for a long time, but the philosophy of this Trinity church only contributes to racism. It is worrisome that a prominent presidential candidate is affiliated with such a group. Our country is made up of people of all →

racess, and we should all work together to be one rather than promoting more racial division.

WHY NOT ALL BE AMERICANS?

We should all be proud to be “Americans.” Coming from both English and Cherokee stock, I yet see no need to be viewed as an: “English-American, or, or a “Native-American.” Imagine the absurdity of each American designating variously designating himself as “Whatever-American” — German-American, French-American, Chinese-American, Japanese-American, Russian-American and umpteen others.

Complicating this whole matter is the sad reality that in the past many black Americans were mistreated. The past can neither be changed nor rerun. The truth is, black Americans are a noble and integral part of our American heritage and culture. More particular is our appreciation and love for our many dedicated and faithful black brethren.

America, even with its blemishes, is the greatest country this world has ever known. She should hold for all her citizens — black, white, and all in between — the same opportunities and responsibilities. We are all just Americans, with no hypen, and we should be thankful and grateful to be able to live here.

If Barack Hussein Obama should become president of our country, and follows the racial goals of his church, it will only division, segregation, and lead to the hurt of our country. — *Editor*

A NOTE OF CORRECTION

In the Nov.–Dec. BOT, we ran an article entitled: “A Concerned Reader Writes.” The writer was David Beble from the Elm Street congregation in St. Charles, MO. It was noted in the article that David had asked that the bundle of BOT we were sending be discontinued. We responded asking: “David, has the Elm Street congregation become one of the congregations which does not believe in orphan homes and congregational cooperation? I know it was not at one time. I spoke there on one occasion.”

I made a mistake. I have never spoken at the Elm Street congregation. I confused that congregation with the Charbo and Karen congregation where I did speak a many years ago. Anyway an alert reader noticed what I said about the Elm Street congregation and informed me that the Elm Street congregation has long been known for her opposition to orphan homes and congregational cooperation. I appreciate the brother of apprising me of this and am glad to make the correction. — *Editor*

Eighth Annual Banner Banner of Truth Lectures Murray, KY June 23-26, 2008

Theme: Worshipping the True God in an Evil World

**The lectures will be held in the excellent
facility of the Curris Center Theatre on
the campus of Murray State University**

**Twenty-eight lessons will be delivered
by preachers, whose combined years
of preaching amounts to hundreds.**

We are now living in what the apostle Paul calls “perilous times.” In this generation, we have never faced such “evil” times as we are now facing. We need to take stock of the situation and put to use God’s provisions for worshipping Him.

Not only do lectures, like the *Banner of Truth* Lectures, help prepare us to stand against the devices of the devil by learning more of God’s will, the fellowship enjoyed by brethren of like faith is a great boost as well.

We urge brethren to make a place in their schedule to attend as many sessions of the lectures as possible. Some come for the entire lectureship and benefit from the twenty-eight lessons which will be presented by brethren who stand fast in the faith, as all of us should do.

“Abstain from all appearance of evil,” (I Thess. 5:22), does not mean something that looks evil, but rather that which is evil. The ASV reads, “abstain from every form of evil.” Some evil may not look evil.

“Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith”

We are now living in “the latter times.” We are seeing what the Spirit spoke expressly come to pass as we have never seen before. Not only are we seeing congregations violate God’s law on fellowship, but we are seeing larger congregations adopt the errors of the Christian Church.

“Quail Springs Church of Christ will add service with musical instruments.”

This headline from an article by Carla Hinton, Religion Editor of *The Oklahoman*. If the contents of this article do not bring tears of sadness to those who love the Lord and His church, something is seriously wrong.

Hinton says that Mark Henderson, “teaching and preaching minister at Quail Springs Church of Christ recently shared information about the church’s plans to add a worship service that will include musical instruments.” Henderson is quoted as saying “the decision came through lengthy prayer and study.”

A question comes to my mind, and that is, how can people pray a lengthy prayer for something which the Lord does not in any way approve? And, what was studied that led to the approval of instrumental music? Could not have been God’s word.

The response to the announcement that the church was going ahead with the use of instrumental music, Henderson said, was “a certain percentage of the congregation broke out in applause and a number of people got up and left in tears.” The number that left was about 300 of the total number of 900 to 950.

We have mentioned only a few things about the decision of the Quail Springs church, but it simply boils down to the matter of doing that which pleases God or that which pleases man. This has been a problem in the past and no doubt will continue to be so. Departing from the faith is generally due to the fact that some had rather do what they want, rather than what God wants. More than a century ago some brethren wanted to please themselves rather than God. They chose to use the instrument.

Richland Hills departs from the faith by adding instrumental music to worship assembly

According to an article by Bobby Ross, Jr., of the *Christian Chronicle* says:

The Richland Hills church in Texas — the largest of the nation’s 13,000 a cappella Churches of Christ — has decided to add an instrumental worship assembly with communion on Saturday nights. Jon Jones, an elder and former pulpit minister at the 6,400 member church, told the congregation Dec. 3 that Richland Hills’ elders “fully and completely” endorsed the decision.

The move of apostasy for the Richland Hills church happened more than a year ago. Jones is quoted as saying, “there is unity in our eldership, and we are so thankful for that.”

Rick Atchley, senior minister, said: “We did not make this decision on a Tuesday and announce it on Sunday.” Then adds, “much study, prayer and fasting by the elders.”

A question comes to my mind — What were the elders studying; for what were they praying, and what effect did the fasting have? If study, prayer and fasting have the same effects as it had on Richland Hills, may we never engage in the same.

The Farmers Branch church, with 1,700 members have “added instrumental services with communion.” The apostasy of this congregation and the others mentioned above is setting an example which will no doubt be followed by others. May the Lord help us to awake to reality and realize that regardless of the number who depart from the faith, we do not have to be among that number. — Editor

WHY DO NOT PEOPLE BELIEVE IN HELL?

Roger D. Campbell

Most of us have heard of the Gallup Poll or Harris Poll. In January 2003, an official Harris Poll was conducted in which American adults were asked about their beliefs concerning eleven different religious matters. The results were both revealing and tragic, though, in all honesty, they were not surprising to anyone that has kept abreast of people's attitude toward the Bible in our country.

The 2003 Harris Poll indicated that out of those Americans polled, 82% of them believed in heaven, yet only 69% believed in hell. Does it not make you wonder why there is a drop in the number of people that believe in hell? Why would people accept the reality of heaven, but deny that there is a hell?

All aspects of the poll are interesting, but there are two other matters relating to hell that really caught my attention as I peered over the poll results. Among those polled who claimed to be Christians, 95% professed to believe in heaven, but only 82% said that they believe in hell. Why would not there be 100% belief in heaven among such people, and why, oh why, would those that claim to be followers of the Christ not have as much faith in hell's existence as they do in heaven's? [All statistics in this article were taken on 11/03/07 from: http://www.harrisinteractive.com/harris_poll/index.asp?PID=359].

"When you die, where do you think you will go – heaven, hell, purgatory or somewhere else? That specific question was part of the Harris Poll in 2003, and it was asked only to those who said they believe in life after death. Guess what? Out of those who answered this question only 1% of those surveyed indicated that they thought they would go to hell. Let us place two facts side by side: 69% of all adults questioned said they believe in hell, but when you narrow it down to those who profess to believe in life after death, of those that believe in an eternal soul, only 1% think they are hell-bound. That must mean that the majority of the Americans who believe in both life after death and hell take the approach that hell is a place "for the other guy, but not for me." In contrast to the falsehoods which so many of our deceived countrymen

have accepted, Jesus taught that those taking the path to life are few, while those heading to destruction in the broad way are many (Matt. 7:13-14).

We would guess that Americans' basic beliefs have not drastically changed since the above-mentioned Harris Poll was conducted nearly five years ago. If anything, it is most likely that during the past years Americans' belief in fundamental Bible doctrines has declined. When it comes to the topic of hell, the present reality is that in 21st-century America, many people do not believe in a hell in which people will suffer eternal punishment. This is a definite change from the outlook and attitude that folks in our nation had a few decades ago. Why is that? Why are there so many, including some who are church-goers and count themselves as Christians, who do not believe in hell?

The bottom line in identifying the reason for people's failure to believe in hell is that Satan has blinded their eyes. The Bible plainly states that the devil, "the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them" (2 Cor. 4:4). The Son of God taught about hell. He taught that it is a real place that is to be feared and avoided at all costs (Matt. 10:28; Mk. 9:43-48). Jesus also clearly stated that there will be some who "shall go away into everlasting punishment" (Matt. 25:46). Thus, the message of the gospel includes the truth that hell really does exist, and it is a place of eternal punishment. Those that fail to believe this truth have been blinded.

Why do not people believe in hell? There must be those who do not believe in hell because they have never heard the Bible's teaching about it. Without such information, they are left in the dark about hell and what it is like. Their ignorance can be remedied only by hearing the gospel. As we spread the good news of Jesus, we need to tell folks not only of the heavenly inheritance that God's faithful can attain, but also the horrors of hell that we want to avoid.

A second group of people that do not believe in hell are those that do not accept the Bible to be a

truthful book. Because they are not convinced that the Bible is the word of God, they reject what it says about hell. We understand such an unbelievers position, and at the same time we recognize our need to be able to prove that the Bible really is the inspired word of God (2 Tim. 3:16), and thus what it says about every single subject, including hell, is reliable and correct. We have our work cut out for us in convincing people that the Bible is not the product of men, but came from the mind of God.

Then, again, there are some that claim to believe that the Bible is the word of God, but they are sincerely convinced that there is no eternal hell. Sadly, some of those people are members of the Lord's church. Such folks say that they believe in hell, but their concept of hell is not one of eternal torment. They may talk about "hell on earth" of the fantasy that that the wicked will suffer only for an instant, then be annihilated. They might buy into the idea that hell is only a temporary place from which people can somehow escape. Regardless of the form of their denial, any person that claims to believe in the Bible, yet at the same time does not believe what God's Book says about eternal hell, does not really believe the Bible at all. How do we even know that there is a place called hell, anyway? From the Bible, of course. Because that is so, we need to accept all that the Bible says about hell and not try to conjure up our own ideas about it.

Why do not people believe in hell? There are strong indications that some folks do not believe in hell simply because they do not want to believe in a place of eternal judgment. They are convinced that if they deny that hell exists, then this somehow opens the door for them and gives them the liberty to live in any ungodly fashion that they desire. They love to fulfill the lusts of the flesh, and it is comforting to them to deceive themselves into thinking, "It is okay for me to live however I want to, because, hey, there is no hell anyway. So what's the harm of living it up?" Rest assured that on the day of judgment, folks that are eternally confined to punishment in hell will not be thinking that there is no hell, nor will they be persuaded that the pleasures of sin in this life were just too great to pass up. According to Jesus, some are bound for eternal life, while the majority are bound for eternal punishment (Matt. 7:13-14; 25:46). Those are the only two

possibilities. Those that indulge in the works of the flesh, regardless of how much they enjoy it, will be left out of the kingdom of God (Gal. 5:19-21). That only leaves one alternative destiny for such people.

It is said that some denominational preachers never speak on the topic of hell. If that be the case, that would explain why some denominational members do not believe in it. As sad as that is, it is even more tragic when members of the church of Christ that call themselves gospel preachers will not preach on hell. Evangelists are obligated before both the Lord and men to preach the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27). That includes what the gospel says about hell and its inhabitants. What legitimate reason could a preacher of the gospel have for not sounding forth God's truth about hell? There is no legitimate reason for refusing to teach what the Bible says about *any* topic! If a man's approach is that he is not going to teach on hell because he wants to please people and keep them happy, then he cannot be counted as a faithful servant of Christ (Gal. 1:10).

Sometimes congregations and/or their elderships have a hand in helping a preacher decide that it is best not to ever speak about hell. The appeal from the brethren in the local church may be for the evangelist(s) to present only what the listeners count as "positive," "loving," "uplifting" messages. While it is true that one could "wear out" the topic of hell by making that his major theme in every lesson, it is just as true that an intentional failure to preach the message of hell, is in actuality, a demonstration of a lack of respect for Jesus and what He taught about hell.

Brethren, Jesus taught about hell. He taught pointedly about it. Surely, no right-thinking person would ever accuse the Master of being unloving. There has never been, nor will there ever be, a more loving teacher than the Son of God. Thus, in order to imitate Jesus, it is not only possible, but necessary, that we love people, and love them enough to teach them what the Bible says about heaven and hell. We pity the poor soul that is so in love with his own wisdom that he thinks he is too smart, too good, or too loving to teach the truth about hell. Rest assured that that if we please God, we must teach about hell.

— 120 Will Lewis Dr. SE, Cleveland, TN 37323

Revelation, Roadmap, and Relationship

We begin by affirming that God has communicated His will to man; to deny it would be to make christianity meaningless. The substance or content of that communication came by way of “revelation.” What was once “hidden,” or a “mystery,” is now completely “known,” in the sense of being available for our learning (Ephesians 3:3,4,9,10).

This “revelation” is, by its very nature, *descriptive* and *propositional*: It says, or affirms, certain things; it is consequently *objective*. Thus, to be “right,” one must ascertain the meaning of that which is revealed and abide thereby. What we are emphasizing here is intuitive and ought to be obvious to all; unfortunately it is not. On the radio, a Baptist preacher once preached a lesson entitled “Seven Myths about the Will of God.” The first thing that he averred to be a “myth” is the idea that “The Bible is a like a road map or a guide.” In a voice designed for effect, he said, “The Bible is not a road map, but a relationship.” It is a day spoiler when someone creates a disjunction when there is none. Why do people feel the need to force their *either/ors* into the Bible? Apparently thinking himself profound, the preacher would have us believe that the concepts of “road map and guide” exclude the concept of “relationship,” and vice versa.

No one should recoil from affirming that the Bible is a “road map.” It tells us *where* to go, *what* to do, and *how* to both go and do. By it alone do we know when we have arrived where we ought, and whether we have done what we ought. It is equally true that the Bible is “is a relationship,” which is to say the Bible sets forth the terms of a relationship between God and man. It tells us how: sinners are “reconciled to God” (2Co. 5:20); God “dwells” in us (6:16); we become “children of God” (1Jno 3:1), and so on. It is, however, important that we understand the concept of a relationship is totally subordinate to the road map concept: It is only when we are going where, and doing what God tells us that we enjoy what the Bible calls “our fellowship...with the Father, and with his Son Jesus

Christ” (1Jno 1:3). It is not an overstatement to say that many of our preachers have not only been listening to drivel such as this Baptist preacher propounded; they have accepted it and are preaching it from our pulpits. Beware!

The Bible is no less a roadmap of the Godhead unfolding through history the great *purpose*. In it God reveals “the dispensation of that grace of God” (Eph 3:2). This “revelation” from God to man, came over a period of time; there were many and varied methods of that “revelation” (Hebrews 1:1) One of those *methods* is that of Types and Antitypes. Paul emphasizes that the Exodus and the Wandering of the Israelites are not simply recorded as matters of history. He says that they happened by divine arrangement: “These things were our *tupoi* [types]” (1Co 10:6). Their trek from bondage to the land of promise overlays the greater trek from “the earth” to “above, where Christ is seated on the right hand of God” (Col 3:1,2).

What we know as the Bible is that *written down, available* revelation (Eph 3:3). It is revelation of “the eternal purpose of God, which he purposed in Christ Jesus” (v. 11). The manifestation or realization of God’s purpose was and continues to be: The church of the Christ (v. 10). This purpose, the church, was once “hid in God”; but through the preaching of Paul and others “all men [now] see what is the dispensation of the mystery” (9). Whereas the “angels [once] desire[d] to “look into these things” (1Pet 1:12); Paul said that it is only “now unto the principalities and powers in the heavenly places...[that they have been] made known through the church” (Eph 3:10). It is only when we see, or perceive, the church that we finally understand just what God had in mind through all of His activities during the centuries from Adam to Christ.

“Relationship” not a “road map”? Indeed! Verily “hath...God made foolish the wisdom of this world” (1Co 1.20)?

—AA

Quantifiable Restoration?

Churches of Christ in the United States came to be and flourished on the premise that the religion of Christ, variously called: “the Way,” “the faith,” “the church,” et al, is a singular, absolute and objectively identifiable entity; and that in any generation it can be imitated, repeated, and perpetuated by application of the pattern which has through the ages been passed down by way of the New Testament.

THIS PREMISE IN ACTION: RESTORATION

The word *restoration* came to embody this premise in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries. Many Europeans and Americans were weary of Catholicism and Protestant Denominationalism which, though identifiable on their own terms, were clearly not the religion—the way, the faith, the church—Christ established. Not a few such weary souls set out to “restore”—in the sense of: “bring back into being”—the one and only religion of Christ. The church of Christ has never gone “out of being” in that its “pattern” or “seed” has ever been with us (II Timothy 1:13; Luke 8:11); nor, for that matter, is it reasonable to conclude that there was a period of hundreds of years when “churches of Christ” (Rom 16:16) vanished from the planet. Some people feel it necessary to affirm this because “history” makes no mention of it. It is never wise to infer from what one does not know. As to what “history” says, remember the old adage: He who controls the history books, controls history; then, remember who controlled the history books for hundred of years. There is no reason to doubt that from the First Century to the present there have always been people dedicated to following the New Testament pattern. Inasmuch, though, as the way or religion of Christ was not a widely observable institution in the Nineteenth Century the idea of restoration was a fitting one.

ALL PURSUE, BUT NONE ATTAIN, SOME SAY

There are those among us now who no longer view restoration as an attainable goal, and they par-

ticularly deny that churches of Christ are the realization of that goal. They speak of restoration in terms of an “ongoing process.” They view the denominations, as well as the churches of Christ, as all involved in the same noble quest, the only difference being that of proximity: some are nearer, some are closer, but all are seeking the religion of Christ. Of course, were one inclined to stipulate the point, we call to mind that proximity only counts in horseshoes and hand grenades. When Jesus told the man “thou art not far from the kingdom of God” (Mar 12:34), He was advocating pursuit of proximity, rather a real objective goal.

This Star Trek view of restoration — boldly going somewhere — is in absolute conflict with the objective perception of restoration which has for more than a century sustained churches of Christ in the United States. The objective perception of restoration is that of using the New Testament as a pattern and systematically checking actions and accomplishments against the criteria of that pattern. It is a closed-end process by which one can compare the pattern and the product and say, Done that, got that; and finally say, Finished.

This perception of restoration sees “restoring” the original religion of Jesus in the same objective terms as those used of Moses in the building of the tabernacle where it is said, “Moses was warned of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern that was showed thee in the mount” (Hebrews 8:5). Just as there was some point at which Moses could compare what was being built against the “pattern that was showed him in the mount” and finally say, Done; so it is the case that we today may do the same. Why would one imagine that under Moses restoration was an attainable goal, whereas under one “worthy of more glory than Moses” (Hebrews 3:3), it is not.

QUANTIFICATION AND RESTORATION

What galls liberals within the church today is the idea of counting or ticking off things. →

You see, with them it is all about feeling good, not what you do. Since feelings can neither be measured nor quantified, nobody is in any position to point to another and say, You are not right with the Lord because you have not yet done this, or you lack that; or, Here is something you are doing of which God has never spoken.

Take for example the salvation of a sinner. In a religious discussion with a gentleman years ago, I had set forth the terms or procedure at the end of which a sinner may know that his “iniquities are forgiven” (Rom 4:7). The gentleman, so steeped in Calvinism, got exasperated and exclaimed, “You can’t just boil things down to a few simple terms.” He was particularly exercised over the idea of counting off five—no more, no less—things that a sinner must “do” in order to be saved. Our liberals have joined this gentleman. They speak snidely of five-steppers.

Yes, it is by “grace” we are saved, and yes, it is “not of ourselves,” just as surely as it was by “grace” and not of “Naaman” that his skin was made “clean” (Eph 2:8; 2Ki 5:14). Yet, it is equally clear that Naaman had to dip—now c-o-u-n-t—seven times in the Jordan River.

In the New Testament, we can find several things which must occur before a sinner can “call upon the name of the Lord” and “be saved” (Rom 10:13). He must “hear...the glad tidings” (vv. 14,16). He must “believe” the gospel (Mk 16:15-16). He must “repent” (Ac 2:38; 17:30-31). He must “confess Jesus as Lord” (Rom 10:9-10). He must be “baptized for the remission of sins” (Ac 2:38). In fact, baptism is viewed as the comprehensive consummating act of a sinner “calling” on God to save him, which is why Ananias tells a believing penitent Paul, “arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on his name” (Ac 22:16).

It surely is not a bad thing that those things to be done by the one “calling” on God total: 1,2,3,4 — 5. Nor, surely is it a bad thing to point out that one who does not fit this pattern has not yet “called” and is not “saved.” Verily, it is a hard thing to “kick against the goad” of quantifiable restoration.

Let Sleeping Dogs Lie

Jesus had a special affection for the sisters, Mary and Martha, and their brother Lazarus (Jno 11.5); yet, when news came from Bethany that Lazarus was near death (vv. 3,14,21), Jesus purposely delayed going to him (v. 6) for the high purpose of demonstrating the “glory of God” (vv. 4, 11, 15) in raising Lazarus.

Now, Lazarus was “sick” (v.3), yet his “sickness [was] not unto death” (v. 4). Jesus, having waited long enough for Lazarus to succumb to his illness, tells his disciples: “Our friend Lazarus is fallen asleep; but I go, that I may wake him out of sleep” (v. 11). The disciples did not grasp the sleep/death metaphor; they “thought he spake of taking rest in sleep” (v. 13). He went on to tell “them plainly, Lazarus is dead” (v.14).

As an aside, Scripture is full of metaphors and other figures of speech, but the Spirit does not always *plainly* tell us: This is what I mean. We must follow context and common sense and not insist that what is a metaphor or figure of speech be taken literally. But, back to the point.

After the two day delay, the Lord had said “Let us go into Judaea again” (v. 7), to which the disciples responded saying, “The Jews were but now seeking to stone thee; and goest thou thither again?” (v. 8). Then He told them that he was going to wake up Lazarus; and, they said, “Lord, if he is fallen asleep, he will do well [or, recover]. It is not unreasonable to surmise that 1) given the danger of their being stoned if they went into Judaea, and 2) their thinking that Lazarus was really sleeping, and 3) they saw no need risking trouble, and Lazarus could just wake up when he was well. It reminds one of the saying: Let sleeping dogs lie.

People, who are in sin, are “dead” (Eph. 2.1); some christians are “weak and sickly, and not a few sleep” (1Co. 11.30). I wonder sometimes whether we convince ourselves that maybe they will just wake up on their own and “do well.” I wonder also whether we deep down just do not want to go and awaken them because of fear of the consequences. Not that anybody would stone us, but they might get upset and offended.

The Sleeping/Dogs/Lie thing is sometimes used to cover for our lack of care and courage. Lost people will not just wake up and recover; they need our help.

The Assembly and Acts of Worship

First Corinthians 11:17 — 16:9 contains a continuous, connected composite of what we often call “the worship service,” “church,” “preaching,” and so on; in other words: THE ASSEMBLY. In this beautiful assembly collage, we see: *The People of It*— “whole church assembled together” (14:23), men and women [vv. 34-35]); *The Nature of It*— “worship God...God is among you” (25), “speak...to God” (v. 28) [cf. “all here present before God” (Ac 10:33)]; *The Place of It* (“together...into one place” [1Co 11:20]); *The Purpose of It* — “church [being] edify[ied]” (14:5); and *The Time of It* (“the first day of every week” (16.2, NASV).

WHAT ARE PEOPLE TO DO IN THE ASSEMBLY?

Now, as to *The Activities of It*: A careful consideration of our text will show five separate and distinct acts. We say this with the complete awareness that there are those among us who literally scoff at the notion of any acts of worship, much less five specific ones. They are the same people who scoff at the plan of salvation and ridicule the “five-steppers.” The fact is, in both cases, it is a simple matter of arithmetic.

These activities of the assembly are “acts of reverence paid to God”; that is, they are acts of worship. One, there is *hearing* (“the word [voice] of the Lord”; Cf. Is 28:14, 23; Neh 8:1-8) which is led by one who preaches (Ac 20:7, KJV) or speaks (1Co 14:19). A second act is the *Lord’s Supper* by which the assembly participates in an act the goal of which is “remembrance of me” (11:25). A third is *singing* (14:15), which is to be done “to the Lord” (cf. Eph 5:19). Each of these acts takes place in an assembly gathered before God; and each act is uniquely “God-ward.” Not a single one of these acts is spectator oriented; rather, each is group-oriented, collective and participatory. The New Testament knows nothing of an assembly wherein one or more *do* these “acts of worship,” while an audience of appreciative (even “edified”) spectators

looks on. It is ironic that some Christians view First Corinthians fourteen, not as part of New Testament teaching on “the assembly,” rather as a unique First Century gathering in which some of the assembled in essence *performed*. There is absolutely no warrant for such a conclusion. The “whole church assembled together” (14:23) is a lovely example of collective, “joint participation (fellowship).” In the assembly, each Christian gathered, participates heart and soul, “in spirit and in truth” (Jno 4:24), in each act of reverence to the glory of God.

A fourth assembly act of worship is that of giving. Every so often, you come across someone who thinks he has discovered that the act of giving in the assembly is not an act of worship. But, just from a cursory perspective note: 1) giving is surely an act, and, 2) it is an act — something we do — in the assembly. Yet, let us note further.

First, that an act of giving, an offering of a portion of one’s material goods, can *ever* qualify as an act of worship, is seen in Matthew 2:11. The record says when the wise men “were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.” Surely, no one will dispute that these men from the East were giving a portion of their material goods; and that that very act of giving was indeed an act of worship.

Secondly, as regards “giving” in the assembly, consider carefully the context: We have an assembly of “the whole church” coming together on the “first day of every week.” Among the various activities of that assembly, each Christian (“every one of you”) was to “lay by him in store as God hath prospered him” (1Co 16:2). We have a *specific* act, done at a *specific* time, and in a *specific* setting or place (“in the assembly”). It was done →

with view toward and in consideration of how God “hath prospered” the giver.

This assembly, by its nature, was “God-ward,” gathered “before God.” Wouldn’t then, this divinely prescribed act, therefore be an “act of reverence paid to God”? Isn’t that precisely what worship is? “But,” one might demur, “Does it follow that anytime I take money from my pocket to give to a good cause or a needy person, I am, therefore, worshipping?” No. Such “giving” falls under the broad purview of christian service; it is absent that “to-God” quality which constitutes it an “act of worship” in the assembly.

The fifth “act of worship” in which the assembly participates is prayer. We pray “Our Father who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name” (Matt 6:9). Prayer, we see, by its nature, is an act of worship whenever or wherever it is done. And it is to be done in the assembly (1Co 14:15-17; 2Tim 2:1, 8).

So much more could, and should, be said about the assembly. There should be no doubt that the picture of THE ASSEMBLY painted by Paul in First Corinthians 11:17 ³/₄ 16:9 gives the lie to: 1) The idea that the New Testament does not speak of “worship services”; 2) The idea that the assembly, the one in which the five acts of worship are done, may be divided on any basis; 3) The idea that women may lead the assembly in its acts of worship — whether as speaker, prayer leader, song leader, translator, or or with regard to giving or the Lord’s Supper; 4) The idea that part of the assembly may do the acts of worship while the rest watch and listen; and 5) The idea that an act of worship which is to be exclusively done in the assembly may be rightly done out of the assembly; and, of course, 6) The age-old idea that a person can get just as close to God out of the assembly as can all those people in the assembly.

—AA

Through the Will of God

“Will” [*theleima*] is the objective idea of design or purpose. As to the creation of “all things,” it is because of God’s “will they were, and were created” (Rev. 4:11). We are “sons through Jesus Christ...according to the good pleasure of his will” (Eph. 1:5). Paul was greatly concerned that christians be “filled with the knowledge of his will” (Col. 1:9). We sometimes entertain the idea of something being “God’s will” when it is not.

Paul was an apostle “through the will of God” (2Co. 1:1). “Through” [*dia*] means: in consequence of, by, on the basis of, by the agency of. This must have been an important matter, because no less than five times Paul makes it clear that his being an apostle was “through the will of God.” He served in this capacity in consequence of God’s design or purpose. Is it possible for people to do and be certain things, yet not “through the will of God”? Clearly so. Jesus spoke of those “that call themselves apostles and they are not” (Rev. 2:2); thus, they were not apostles through the will of God.

What about “preachers”? Can one call himself, and be called by others, “preacher,” yet not be so through the will of God? What about “elders”? Can one call and be called “elder,” yet not through the will of God? What about “teachers”? Would we not have to determine whether one is respectively preacher, elder or teacher through the will of God on the basis of “the knowledge of his will” (Col. 1:9)?

Is it God’s will that those called “elder” be incapable of teaching? be intemperate? have dysfunctional homes? Is it God’s will that those called “preacher” not be full of the word and pure in life? Is it God’s will that those called “teacher” be novices? not be faithful in attending all assemblies of the church? When we call, or allow ourselves to be called something, we imply that we are such “through the will of God.” We had better make sure of that.

What about things we do, or not? “Which...did the will of his father,” Jesus asked (Matt. 21:31). His true family, He said, is comprised of “whosoever shall do the will of God” (Mar. 3:35).

—Continued on P. 16

Biblical Conversion and the Human Heart

Before birth, the child in the womb must undergo several stages of change; and it's the same with a person who converts or turns to God. That person must successfully undergo a change of heart, a change of life, and finally, a change of relationship.

A concordance will bear out the fact that the word "heart" is used to refer to the: thinking, willing, morally conscious, and emotional part of man. The avenue through which a sinner's heart is changed is "faith," or trust in the fact that what God says is so. "Faith," Paul says, "cometh of hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17). Then again, "with the heart man believeth unto righteousness" (Romans 10:10). The Lord Himself explains, that only those who "perceive with their eyes, And hear with their ears, And understand with their heart" are those who truly "turn again" (Matthew 13:15). Faith is what motivates one to become "obedient from the heart to that form of teaching" (Romans 6:17).

Saving faith, or trust, which changes the heart, only comes to a person who has first, intellectually processed certain facts and information which lead him to conclude that God is; that the Bible is the Word of God; and that, Jesus Christ is the Son of God. "Without faith it is impossible to be well-pleasing unto God" (Hebrews 11:6), and it further explains that "he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that seek after him." The information which intellectually leads us to accept that conclusion comes through various avenues. For example, Inspiration, in Romans 1:20 tells us that "the invisible things of God since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even his everlasting power and divinity; that they may be without excuse." Paul appeals to the intellect of the Greeks when he gives them a marvelous lecture in Acts 17, on the "God that made the world and all things therein." Concluding his logical discourse, he says that God, intellectually, is "not far from each one of us," (v. 27), thus, in verse 29, he says, "Being then the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and device of man."

One must also intellectually process information that warrants the conclusion, the belief, that "all scripture is given by the inspiration of God" (II Timothy 3:16). There are many areas of internal, as well as external, evidence which cause one to reasonably conclude that production of such a book as the Bible is beyond the pale of human capability. Man as he is; that is with his self-evident limitations, could not have produced the Bible as it is, leaving, then, only one possibility: "it is in truth, the word of God" (I Thessalonians 2:13). And, finally, one must learn, process, and be convinced by certain information set forth in the Scriptures. For example, in the Gospel of John, we're told "these are written, that ye may believe" (John 20:30-31).

But, the intellectual, the evidential aspect of faith is only part of the program. The potential convert must also come to be "pricked in his heart" (Acts 2:37) by the force of his personal guilt for the sins committed against God; and by the knowledge that "while we were yet sinners Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). And, finally, he must "will" himself to do what God tells him. Which is why Paul describes the Roman saints as having "from the heart obeyed that form of teaching" (Romans 6:17). Without what Paul calls the "obedience of faith" (Romans 1:5), a complete change of heart can never take place.

Many people think of faith only in terms of what they feel—which does have its place—but, their faith is never educated by what the Word says, nor is it fulfilled by the willingness to obey. Such people were "many of the rulers" who "believed on him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess it, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: for they loved the glory that is of men more than the glory that is of God" (John 12:42). These gentlemen had intellectually accepted the fact that Christ is who is said He is; they had also been moved in the emotional sense; but, the willingness to comply with His will was not there. In their case, there was no change of heart.

Understanding what the Bible means by "heart" and God's method of changing the heart through faith gives new meaning to "heartfelt" religion. —AA

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Through the Will of God —

Is it through God’s will that we watch impure movies, and listen to impure music? Is it God’s will that we wear skimpy and provocative dress? Is it God’s will that we go out on the dance floor? Is it God’s will that we do not pray and study our bibles? Is it God’s will that we choose to be doing other things or elsewhere during the set times of “assembling ourselves together” — games, work? Is it God’s will that we feel too bad to go to church, but not too bad to do other things and go other places?

Whether we say it outright like Paul: “through the will of God,” or we imply it; either way claiming something is God’s will when it is not is something that ought to give us pause. —AA

Winked At Ignorance

Gentiles were obligated to *know* and live in harmony with what God had revealed to them (Rom 1:18ff); and, likewise the Jews (2:1). At what “ignorance,” then, did God “wink...” (Ac 17:30)?

It was their ignorance of God’s complete revelation, and that because it was *yet* to come. During those times, God’s plan to save sinners — Jew and Gentile — through Jesus was a “mystery” (Eph 3:1-3, 9-10). Then, it was “a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1Pet 1:5). Then, neither prophets nor angels could know fully what God had in mind (10-12). Of such things, they were *ignorant*; but “now these things have been announced” (12).

Ignorance of Divine revelation has *never* been tolerated or “overlooked,” then or now. Please bear this in mind when you read and apply that classic passage in Acts 17:30-31. —AA

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