



The Head and the Body

Part 3 of a six-part series on “The Church” by Dick York

What if someone were so tall that when you looked out your window you could see his body, but his head was obscured from sight by the top of the window opening. Would you assume that because his head was out of your sight that his hands and feet were moving independently of it? Perhaps that seems like a foolish question, but there is a correlation here to how we perceive the body of Christ. Simply because we cannot see the head does not mean that the members of the body move independently of Him.

Granted, the person in our example is a natural human, while the body of Christ is a spiritual entity. However, the spiritual body of Christ is as real and as factually connected to its Head, as is yours. We have already seen that God raised up Christ from the dead and set Him at His own right hand in heavenly places...and gave Him to be Head over all things to the Church, which is His body.¹ Paul summarized what Jesus did in these words:

“Now that he ascended, what is it but that He also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things.”²

Paul tells us that when Jesus ascended, He gave gifts unto men.³ As we read through the epistles of Paul, we understand that these gifted people are the members of the body of Christ. In Ephesians 4:11, Paul mentions five of these

gifts: apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher. Not only are these giftings to these men, but these men are gifts to the Church. However, God’s gifts are not limited to these five, nor to these men. Every member of the body is gifted in a specific way, as God deems fit. There are obviously different kinds of gifts. Paul makes three separate gift lists in three different epistles, all of them slightly different. One of those is that which we have just cited in Ephesians 4; another is in 1 Corinthians 12; and the third is in Romans 12. These seem to cover the areas of ministry, manifestations and service to the body of Christ, and together they include every member. This is a body; and as in any healthy body, every part has a purpose and every part functions.⁴ However, no part functions independently of the Head.

We must keep in mind that we are talking about a head, not a CEO; and about a body, not an organization. We repeat this because of its extreme importance to the discussion of the Church as the body of Christ. Even though we may acknowledge the organic nature of the Church and her head, the Lord Jesus, and the biologic of the relationship, it is easy and customary to continue to think organizationally. If that happens, we end up with a distorted view of the Church, and consequently of who we are and of our day-to-day relationship with the world.

While warning the Colossian believers about error, Paul

explained this relationship. There were those, he said, who did not hold the Head, Jesus,

“From which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God.”⁵

Paul speaks as though the nourishment for the whole body flows from the Head; and as it does, it courses through the members to the other members. By joints and bands, each body part receives its nourishment from the head. The same scenario is described to the Ephesian believers.

“He [Jesus the Head] gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”⁶

It is evident from the text that these gifts are given for a specific purpose, and for a specific duration of time. The purpose is to perfect the saints for the work of the ministry, which is to edify the body of Christ. The duration of time is until we all come into the unity of the faith and grow up to the stature of the fullness of Christ. So nothing has changed since these words were written, since that objective still lies in a future time.

A further objective, and a more immediate one, is:

“That we henceforth [from now on] 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...”⁷

In the present generation, spiritual immaturity and doctrinal instability can be an enormous shadow on the testimony of the body of Christ as the world sees it. The evidence is in the trendiness of the churches, the constant search for new methodology to attract the world, which often becomes a snare to compromise the work of the Spirit. But with “now” as a starting point, the objective announced here is that we should be no more children plagued by immaturity and instability, but that we might be preoccupied with the Truth whereby we might grow up into Christ in everything. Christ is the Head,

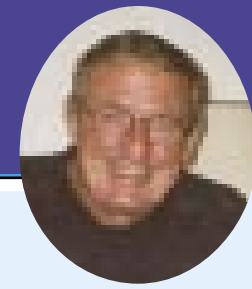
“From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.”⁸

That seems like a mouthful, but the concept is simple. The whole body is made up of parts

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Jim Lucas' Column



Offences

Are you offended? Did I offend you? I have been asked these questions on several different occasions. At times it has been difficult to answer; at other times, I would say, “No, not at all.” If they had done something that was offensive, I would tell them what troubled me, then add, but I am not offended; in other words, I am not going to take this offence. Psalms 119:165 says: “Great peace have they that love thy law, and nothing shall offend them.”

Romans 4:25 says that Jesus was delivered for our offences. He, who was innocent, died for me, who was guilty—not only for me, but also for us all. If Jesus can bear the sin of the whole world, surely we can carry the burden of the few who sin against us. If I am in Christ and Christ is in me, then I should never be offended. Jesus, who never sinned, was treated offensively, but He knew how to handle it. He never allowed it to bring Him down.

The word ‘offence’ means an injury or wrong done to one, a stumbling block or cause of temptation. The Greek word is *skandalon*, properly that which one stumbles over or takes offence. Many professing Christians become *scandalized* over the least little thing. They stumble on very small stones. If we are going to walk victoriously as children of God, we need to learn how to handle offences. In Proverbs 18:19 we read; “A brother offended is harder to be won than a city, and contentions are like the bars of a castle.” This portrays one who has fallen. He is injured, hurting, suffering, and no longer in the battle. He now needs special attention.

Some of us are very thin skinned and we bleed far too easily. When we hear that someone has said something despairing about us, we wonder why he said that? We may say, I never did anything to him. If indeed it is true and we never did anything to deserve such treatment, then we can rejoice, and be exceedingly glad. Remember what Jesus taught us; “Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. **Rejoice and be exceeding glad:** for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you“ (Matt. 5:11,12). Jesus went

on to teach us that we are the salt and the light of the world. If we lose our savor because of offences, then we are good for nothing—we have fallen and are no longer in the battle. We are the light of the world; and the darker it is around us, the more the light will shine. If we believe that we *have light*, we should rejoice in opportunities to let it shine.

In some cases when people come to speak evil of us and we are under attack, we are reaping what we have sowed. This was the case with King David, many years after he had sinned with Bathsheba and had caused the blood of her husband Uriah to be shed. David, when told by the prophet that he had sinned, repented and God forgave him his sin. However, the consequences of his sin would be around for a long time to come. David had offended many because of his sin, perhaps even those of his own household. God is gracious; but unfortunately, man is not so gracious or willing to forgive.

Some of those who had been offended became enemies and brought railing accusations against King David. His own son Absalom betrayed him and sought to take the kingdom of Israel away from him. When King David was fleeing from Absalom, there came a man out by the name of Shimei of the house of Saul, who cast stones at David and cursed him and said; “Come out, come out, thou bloody man, and thou man of Belial.” Abishai, David’s man, wanted to go and cut off Shimei’s, head; but David said; “Behold, my son, which came forth of my bowels, seeketh my life: how much more now may this Benjamite do it? Let him alone, and let him curse; for the Lord hath bidden him. It may be that the Lord will look on mine affliction, and that the Lord will requite me for good for his cursing this day.”

Jesus spoke about offences. He said: “Woe unto the world because of offences! **For it must needs be that offences come:** but woe to that man by whom they come.” In God’s purpose for man, it was necessary that offences come, even Satan being here is a necessary element in God’s eternal plan or he wouldn’t be here. Paul speaks about heresies in the same manner. They must be among us that they who are

approved may be made manifest among you (1 Cor.11:19).

Jesus chose the twelve disciples, knowing one of them was a devil (John 16:70). Jesus was approved among us. He never took offence, even with Judas who supposedly was His friend. He had loved him, washed his feet, supped with him; then when Judas came with the soldiers to arrest him, Jesus simply said: “Betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?”

Woe unto that man by whom offences come. King David suffered for many years because of offences that he caused. Judas Iscariot purchased a field with the reward of iniquity and falling headlong, burst asunder in the midst; and all his bowels gushed out. Offences can cause suffering and heartache. Offence brings death, for through the offence of one (Adam) many be dead (Rom. 5:15). Therefore we need to follow the example Paul left us: “Herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men (Acts 24:16).” If I should cause anyone to be offended because of any wrong that I have done to them, it is paramount that I go to him and do all that’s possible to restore him. The longer it remains unattended, the more it festers and the greater havoc it will bring. **Every believer is responsible before God to give no offence in anything, that the ministry be not blamed:**

“But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watching, in fastings, by pureness, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report: as deceivers yet true; as unknown and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things (2 Cor.6:4-10).”

Jesus watches over the righteous and the humble; it is a serious matter with Him if anyone should offend them. It

doesn’t matter if they are more prestigious or if they are better educated or hold an important position. Woe unto that man by whom offences come. Jesus said; “Whosoever shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea (Mat. 18:6).”

We have no lack of those who are contentious and cause strife and bring divisions in our churches today. They lay stumbling stones all about without any fear of God at all. We should not allow them to stumble us in our walk with the Lord Jesus. We are told in Romans 12:18,19, “If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.” It is good to be wise and understanding what the will of God is. We are to mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which we have learned; and avoid them (Rom.16:17). We need not be surprised or scandalized, the enemy loves this, so why give him the satisfaction. It’s far better to follow the example of our Lord Jesus, who as a lamb was taken to slaughter, yet He opened not His mouth.

Sanctify the Lord of hosts himself; and let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread. And He shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence to both of the houses of Israel (Isa. 8:13,14). The believer has a sanctuary, a place of refuge, a chief cornerstone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on Him shall not be confounded (1 Pet. 2:6). When we fear God and take refuge in Him; there will be those who are offended even though we have done nothing to offend them. These are enemies of the Cross and stumble at the Word because they walk after the flesh. They love the world and the things of the world, and the love of God is not in them. They refuse to fall down and be broken or humbled on the Rock. Therefore the Rock will fall on them and grind them to powder (Mat. 21:44). Jesus said: “Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me” (Mat. 11:6).

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that are perfectly fit together. Not only do they fit with each other, but also they are compacted. They are pressed tightly together like parts of fine furniture that are glued under pressure until the joints are perfect. Every joint is supplying something. Every part is working to its capacity [measure], causing the body to grow up. The body is edifying [building up] itself in love.

As we have stressed before, the concept of the Church is not a new one, nor is it limited to the New Testament. There are diagrams of it in the Old Testament in the Tabernacle in the wilderness and also in Solomon's temple. Let's consider Solomon's temple for an example, and the components of its story.

Solomon, the son of David, was the builder of it. That is prophetic. He foreshadowed the Son of David, the Lord Jesus Christ who said, "I will build my Church."

The Levitical priests ministered within the temple, offering up sacrifices, trimming the lamps and setting in order the Shewbread.

Then there were the stones of which the temple was built.

*"And the king commanded, and they brought great stones, costly stones and hewed stones to build the foundation of the house,"*⁹ *These great foundation stones are a picture of what Peter and Paul both described as the foundation of the Church.*¹⁰

Upon these foundation stones other stones were laid until the walls of that great temple rose to be a dwelling place of God; a place where His name was written, the temple of Jehovah, God of Israel.

*"And the house, when it was in building, was built of stone made ready before it was brought hither."*¹¹

What a picture is drawn for us in this simple statement about

the origin of the stones that made up the temple, which illustrates the Church. The stones were mined from the earth and shaped to fit their place in the building before they were ever installed. That is meant to encourage us. Why did we go through what we experienced before we came to Christ? Because it made us unique and somehow gave us the capacity to exercise the gift with which God has endowed us. It is unlikely there are two identical stones. We cannot, therefore consider ourselves of no consequence. We are each irreplaceable, like fingers on a hand.

We read that Jesus ascended above the heavens. But first He descended into the lower parts of the earth. So "He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things." And does He fill all things? This is what the Church is all about. Since the Holy Spirit was poured out, Christ's body, the Church, is a witness unto Him "both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and in Samaria and to the uttermost part of the earth," just as Jesus told His disciples on the mount of Olives.. As your head governs the fingers on your hand, so the Head of the Church governs every member of the body. Therefore the Church everywhere in the world is governed, not by a human hierarchy, as a company might be, but by its Head as a great living organism.

Tradition is a difficult thing to overcome, especially if it is of long standing and almost universal. Religion has always been a major part of the world system since sin was introduced and Adam fell from his original relationship with God. Religion was the immediate replacement. Since that day, Satan has used religion as his chief weapon of deception. It is adaptable, and almost every spiritual concept has a religious counterpart. This is especially

true as it concerns the definition of the church, church government, ministry and a vast number of related topics.

Most major religions were around before Jesus was born, with the exception of Islam. Satan was already poisoning the well of Truth with many parallel concepts, such as a version of Trinitarianism, of virgin birth, expiation of sin through blood sacrifice, etc. Other pagan doctrines have been preserved and carried over into the world's version of Christianity, such as the worship of the Queen of Heaven which now appears as Mariolatry.

Almost as soon as Jesus had ascended, Satan began his campaign of confusion and deceit so that by the early part of the fourth century he was able to blend the truth with a pseudo version of "Christianity." Until that time, the Church, as Jesus had prophesied, was hated by the world. Christians endured great persecution, especially by the Roman government. Because the government of the Roman Empire was itself a religion, demanding that its citizens worship its emperors as gods, Christians, who refused such worship, were considered a most egregious enemy of the state and persecuted to death.

About 313 AD, however, Constantine, one of the contenders for supreme power over the empire, saw a vision instructing him that through the sign of the cross he would conquer his enemies. He did, and became emperor of Rome. He credited the God of the Christians for his achievement, declared himself a follower of Christ and stopped the persecution. By the time of his death in 337, he had elevated himself to the head of the "church," and, although he would not receive sacrifices, was, by himself and other subscribers to the religion of Rome, considered a deity like the Son of God.¹²

Now there was a religion called "Christianity," which was no

longer persecuted. The "church" had become an official part of the Roman State and it was now even desirable to be a member of it. A hierarchy, as in the Roman government, was established with its bishops and pastors; and a system of clergy and laity became the religious church's tradition. The primate of Rome had become the head of this "church," which, as time went on, became the persecutor of other religions, and even of the true believers that, of course, were never a part of this caricature.

However, religious tradition prevailed; and, because of its power and great influence, "Christianity" became to be considered one of the world's great "religions." For about twelve hundred years it grew, presenting itself as the church that Jesus Christ had planted, incorporating many of the previously-mentioned doctrines and traditions and establishing them as Christian "fundamentals." Some within its ranks, because they sought after God, found Him. In 1511, Martin Luther, a Catholic monk, seeing the corruption of this religious monster, tried to introduce into its doctrine salvation by faith and to reform its practice. The result was the Reformation.

Because of the Reformation, many in the past nearly five hundred years have heard the Gospel in their churches and been saved. But, within the resulting Christian churches, most of the traditions of that Roman religious system still prevail, and are thought to be biblical in spite of the fact that they are not supported by Scripture. So impervious has their influence been, that even in today's Gospel-preaching Evangelical churches, the system is still taught. Seminaries still teach church history as though its legitimate course traces the true church through Catholicism and the Reformation, embracing whatever was not purged from that worldly

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system, and Scripture is interpreted according to that preconception.

It is evident that there are two radically different views of the church represented here. One is an organic body, every member of which is controlled by the Head and has a part in nourishing the body and being nourished by it. The other is a religious political organization with a ruling hierarchy and subservient laity. Which view of the Church we hold will determine how we see the scriptures that pertain to it. It will color our evaluation of everything from the church meeting to missions to ministry, even to how we perceive success or failure, or view accomplishment, or engage the Great Commission.

The ultimate objective of our Head, the Lord Jesus Christ, is two-fold: first, to redeem some from every kindred, tongue, people and nation; and second, to perfect the Church. To that end, He gave His life. This was reflected in His final instructions to those He left behind. He said,

*“All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”*¹³

At this time, Jesus said that power [authority] was given to **Him**. Therefore **they** were to go, and He would be with them. There was no promise here of power independent of His presence. Then He said to them, “Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you.”¹⁴

And they did receive power. But when that power was displayed through them, they acknowledged that it was not their power, but

the power of the Lord Jesus that was doing the work.¹⁵ Paul taught the church at Ephesus that God is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that they ask or think. Obviously, then, they could not plan it, strategize for it, or even pray specifically about it. Nevertheless, He would do it through the power that worked in them.¹⁶ Furthermore, the apostle Paul taught the Philippian believers the same thing when he wrote to them,

*“Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.”*¹⁷

Apparently the Philippians were like most of us. They behaved and worked well under the supervision of Paul. Now, because he will be absent, he is instructing them to work out their own salvation, because God is working in them both to will and to do of His good pleasure. Perhaps it was easy for them to believe that God was working in Paul, therefore, they would perform because of him. But the message is, perform because of your own salvation, not mine; because God is also working in you, not only in me.

This is an important principle in the life of believers. Church life is not being a member of an organization (even if it is called a church), keeping its rules and participating in its program. Obeying God is not the same as doing what the man in charge tells me to do, or living up to the traditions. Jesus said it this way,

*“As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father; so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me.”*¹⁸

This was not said for the immediate hearers only, or directed at a special group of people. Its

subject is “he that eateth me,” whoever that might be. Those who are partakers of Christ, then, live by Him in the same way that He lived by the Father. Jesus did not live a life independent of His Father. He didn’t receive a briefing every morning by letter or by email or by telephone conversation telling Him how to live and what to do for the day, and then it was up to him to figure out how to get it done. To His disciple Philip, Jesus said,

*“Believest thou not that I am in the Father and the Father in me? The words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, He doeth the works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works’ sake.”*¹⁹

Jesus was in the Father and the Father dwelled and walked in Him. God was not far away in another world. The Omnipresent Father occupied the very space Jesus occupied. And the Father was doing the work that was being done in and through Jesus. What’s more, Jesus continued by saying,

*“Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also, and greater works than these shall he do because I go unto my Father.”*²⁰

The tense of the verbs in Jesus’ statement is critical to His meaning. He did not say, “the works that I did shall he do also;” or “that I have done.” Had He said that, we would assume that He would expect us to imitate some work that He had done in the past. But Jesus himself has already told us that even when He worked, it wasn’t Him, but His Father working. He did what His Father was doing. It is clear, then, that we who believe will not imitate what He did in the past, but we will do what He is doing today. How do we know that that was His meaning? Because the rest of the

New Testament bears it out. For example, Paul said on one occasion, “I also labor, striving according to his working which worketh in me mightily.”²¹

There are gifts of the Spirit, and they are distributed among every member of the body. Each one has his own measure, and each is unique. As each of us obeys the leading of the Spirit, the Lord himself controls and coordinates the members. The head is the head of the whole body. It is also the head of each part of the body: the hands, the feet, etc. It is also the head of each digit on each hand. All are controlled and coordinated by the head. So it is in the body of Christ. He is the Head of the whole body; He is the Head of each assembly; and He is the Head of each member.

Our growing up to maturity, then, is not a matter of learning the rules and complying in a progressively more proficient manner. It is growing up in Him: responding to His leading; knowing His voice, and lending our members as instruments of righteousness unto God.²²

As the saints are not independent of their Head, neither are they independent of one another. Together they are the Church. When they assemble in a locality, they are a microcosm of the Church, and their behavior in the assembly is a demonstration of the leadership of the Spirit.

(Endnotes)

¹ Ephesians 1:20,23

² Ephesians 4:9,10

³ Ephesians 4:8

⁴ Ephesians 4:15,16

⁵ Colossians 2:19

⁶ Ephesians 4:11-13

⁷ Ephesians 4:14,15

⁸ Ephesians 4:16

⁹ 1 Kings 5:17

¹⁰ 1 Corinthians 3:11

Ephesians 2:20

Acts 4:11

¹¹ 1 Kings 6:7

¹² Catholic encyclopedia

¹³ Matthew 28:18-20

¹⁴ Acts 1:8

¹⁵ Acts 3:10; 4:12

¹⁶ Ephesians 3:20,21

¹⁷ Philippians 2:12,13

¹⁸ John 6:57

¹⁹ John 14:10,11

²⁰ John 14:12

²¹ Colossians 1:29

²² Romans 6:13



Eric the Red

A Cock and Bull story by SFMI board member Roy Gable, a real live Oklahoma story teller who was here at the inception of the Shield of Faith Mission

Would you like to hear a story about Eric the Red?

I've met him several times throughout my life, and I must confess, each time I met him I was impressed.

He strutted around a lot, because you see, he was very, very handsome. He thought he was the ruler of the roost, so to speak.

Up in the morning before daylight, Eric the Red, would jump up on the fence, flap his big broad red wings and sing out the most beautiful cock a doodle doo, you have ever heard.

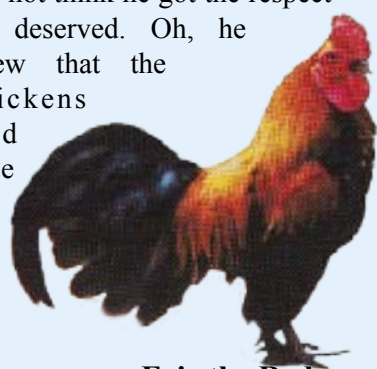
All of the hens would cluck and cackle their approval and scream aloud, "Sing it again, Eric!" And of course, he would oblige with several encores.

All of you, by now, have figured out that Eric was a huge Rhode Island Red rooster.

He was a proud bird and knew he had the admiration of all the lady birds in the hen house; and when he crowed, you could hear him a mile in all directions.

What a gift! What a voice! and he used it well.

But Erick the Red had a secret. He did not think he got the respect he deserved. Oh, he knew that the chickens and the



Eric the Red

other roosters all admired and respected him, and farmer Brown fed him well; but the horse almost stepped on him one day, and even the dog

barked at him. He wanted to be big and strong and cool, like Black Bart.

Black Bart was the envy of the whole farm. Nobody messed with Black Bart, the heavy-weight champion, prize Angus bull and worth a small fortune. Oh! If I could be like him, I would have it made, thought Erick the Red: I would be more admired and have more respect than I have now.

You know what? Black Bart had a secret also. He was jealous. Do you know who he was jealous of? You're right! He was jealous of Eric the Red.

He wanted to sing like Eric the Red. He wanted to be able to jump up on the top rail of the fence and cock a doodle doo, so the whole countryside could hear him. All He did all day was just stand around, chew his cud, and flip flies off his back with his tail.

One day Eric the Red rooster went to sleep and dreamed how he could get more respect, like Black Bart, the prize Angus bull. Well, actually, the dream became a nightmare. Eric began eating grass, and clover and hay; he tried to chew the cud, he tried to swish the flies off his back with his tail feathers; he tried to be strong and look cool like Black Bart.

It was a disaster!

He wasn't strong and he sure didn't look cool. In fact he looked ridiculous trying to swish the flies off his back with his tail feathers.

Beside all that, now he has bad breath. Trying to regurgitate and chew the cud, he developed bull breath. The hens wouldn't have anything to do with him and the other roosters were laughing at him.

Black Bart went to sleep also and dreamed he was going to jump up on the top railing of the fence and crow just as beautiful as Eric the Red.

Well...It was another disaster!

It was so embarrassing. He was able somehow to climb up on the top railing of the fence; but, just as he was

about to sing a cock a doodle doo, the fence broke and he fell in a heap, right on the ground. Black Bart's face turned red, the cows were all laughing at him, and he had bruised his rump.

"Oh my! What have I done? If I could be as I was before, I would never complain again."

Eric the Red was having his own problems, and was heard muttering: "Please let this be a bad dream. Please let this be a bad dream."



Black Bart

In the Bible, the book of Leviticus 6-10, tells of Moses consecrating Aaron and his sons for the priesthood. Moses, following Gods plans for the building of the tabernacle in the wilderness, and God sending down fire and devouring the sacrificed offerings off the altar, the people shouted and fell on their faces. Moses excelled to edify the people and glorify God. Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, because of jealousy, tried to imitate Moses and Aaron's ministry. Therefore, they were destroyed.

Ananias and Sapphira, trying to impress Peter and the Apostles, lying about the land they sold, fell down dead.

In the Bible, the Apostle Paul said: "Be zealous of spiritual gifts that you may excel." Did Paul say that? Yes, but he didn't stop there. He said, "Be zealous of spiritual gifts that ye may excel to the edifying of the Church."

Jesus told Peter, "Satan desires to have you that he may sift you as wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith fail not." And when you are converted, don't just look spiritual or just act spiritual, No!

He said, "When you are converted strengthen your brothers."

How long is it going to take you to mature so you can strengthen your brothers? Or, are you going to be forever learning and never coming to the knowledge of the truth of: Works, Faith, Predestination, Security of the believer, etc., etc.

David was the greatest king Israel ever had; but, because of the blood shed during his reign, God told him he was not to build the temple. There is no doubt David was very disappointed; but, because of his close fellowship with God, he overcame his disappointment by working hard to gather all the materials: the beautiful timbers, the granite and limestone blocks, the gold, the silver, the fine linens. He excelled to the edifying of the people and to the glory of God.

He got everything ready. All Solomon had to do was put it together and, of course, take the credit, because it was never called David's temple. Throughout the ages, it has always been known as Solomon's Temple.

Oh, yes, I almost forgot; Eric the Red and Black Bart awoke very relieved that it was all a bad dream. Black Bart was content, after that, just to proudly stand in the field chewing his cud, swish the flies off his back and do what a prize bull does best.

Eric the Red enjoys, more than he ever did before, jumping on the top rail of the fence and singing out his beautiful song every morning.

Well now, that's the end of my story.

Now I know, like myself, you're going to have a problem trying to fight off the temptation of calling this a "cock and bull story", but if it helps you to remember to minister and serve God with the gifts He has given you to excel to the edifying of the Church, go ahead, call it what every you will.



Jerry Skiles' Ivory Coast Report

This was my best visit to Ivory Coast. It is impossible for me to express how the Lord can give a joy greater than the tragedy and suffering we face in this world. Many of the believers I saw were experiencing it as well.

The rebel-controlled area is improving. The Baptist hospital is operating with medicines and staff. The rebels still have guns, but they're not shooting them in the air as they used to do. The schools and government-administrated offices are still closed. An equilibrium of sorts now exists; the rebels have taken about all that can be taken without provoking a civil uprising. They recognize the need of order to survive themselves, so are allowing businesses and activities to function somewhat unmolested.

In the past the tribal area was always known for lack of obedience to government law, now the rebels are the

government and they are not able to instill it either. The rebellion began motivated by ideology, now they have joined the rest of the inhabitants simply struggling for survival.

I made a couple of personal visits to the rebel leaders at their headquarters and I was treated with respect. I had some trouble with a group of about eight rebels who stopped me on a road as I was leaving the area. It ended when one of them began to speak to me in the Loron language. We spoke at considerable length and I was given my leave.

Seeing Hovare was my greatest joy. He continues to minister faithfully. His school continues to function. He has added other teachers and has involved others in the translation of the Scriptures. He gave me the Gospel of Mark to work on and we worked together on the Gospel of Matthew he had translated. The Matthew translation had some inconsistencies and he wanted my help in that. He also was given the translated portion of Proverbs.

The Lord has burdened Hovare, a Loron, for the Loma ministry and he asked to be allowed to teach at the Loma village. We met together with the Loma believers

and they all welcomed Hovare. The tribes in Ivory Coast have great animosity and distrust of one another, so this bonding and welcoming was really of the Lord. We are praying that a Loma believer will desire to work with Hovare with translating the Scriptures to the Loma language. He has individuals who he feels can do the work of the ministry among his Loron people when he is working with the Loma.

Hovare has mentioned many times a willingness to take the Gospel where it never has been preached. There still remain a couple of villages not far from him that are completely isolated from the Gospel due to the power of the strong fetishes there. He reminded me of them this trip as well. May God help Hovare to accomplish what is on his heart.

I'm excited about what the Lord is doing in the Loma and Loron tribes. Discipleship is taking place. The Word is being taught and it is being followed by action.

I want to express my sincere appreciation to all those who pray for the ministry in Ivory Coast. Jesus is building His Church and nothing will hinder or stop it.



Jerry traveled alone to the village which has been their home for several years. His transportation was a motor bike. The cashew orchards he taught the tribesmen to cultivate are producing to provide an economic base for the Loma people. God is raising up from among the people men who are able to minister the Word. Shown above are Hovare and Telkore

Ministry Update



Steve and Linda Montgomery

Billy Hurst, who with his wife is serving the Lord in Lagos de Moreno, the northern edge of the Jalisco Highlands, attended a meeting where I spoke briefly about the need in the Highlands, basing my call on Ps.119:126, which says, "It's time for you, Lord, to act..." We spoke afterward about his desire to motivate prayer for this region. Today, I received this email, which I pass on to you. Billy gives his email address, but if you will send your responses to me, I will be blessed to hear from you and will pass them on to him. If you pray for us or this region of Mexico, don't assume I already know that. I need to hear from you! A single line - "We're praying!" will be sufficient if you're pressed for time. Thank you!

Here is Billy's email:

"Dear Prayer Partners,

"We are grateful for all of the responses that we have received concerning your prayer support! I'm writing today to ask for your help in a special prayer project. One of our team goals is to have 3,000 people praying for the work in the Highlands of Jalisco, Mexico. To do so, I'm currently working on a list of how many people receive prayer requests from the Highlands and pray for them at least once. Here in the Highlands we have five evangelical missionaries working. Between all five we have (to our knowledge) 1,100 people praying for the ministry in the Highlands. So, we are short of our goal. Here are several ways that I would like for you to help us:

"We believe that God is up to something great here in the Highlands!

Quoting one of the missionary's prayers in these days, 'It is time for you to act, O Lord, For they have regarded your law as void' Psalms 119:126."

Editor's note: He requests that **1.** You solicit individuals to request prayer information about the Highlands and to pray. **2.** That you share the vision with churches for the purpose of prayer, and **3.** That you pass on "creative ideas as to how we could promote prayer for the people living in the Highlands, please send us your ideas."

A subsequent report from Steve

"Thanks to the many of you who have responded to our last email asking to know how many are praying. We are still making up that list of 3,000 intercessors, so if you haven't written us and are praying (or will pray, please write. Also, we would like to know how many churches are praying. If you haven't written yet and regularly share prayer news from here or pray for us as a congregation, please drop a note letting us know what church it is. Thanks!

"Here are some immediate requests:

"Leonardo: A young man (30), drug addict, son of a man (deceased) who ran a bar and raised his boys to work and live in the bar (all of them are alcoholics). This young man has asked me to meet with him to study the Bible. His life is so disorganized that he goes to work occasionally at 7 am (brick-making), leaves work when he wants, then doesn't go the next day, then goes the following day at 10 am. He uses all the money he earns on drugs or drink. Every time I've been to his house for a study (we have tried to do the study in the early morning), I find him in bed, asleep, with the TV on, having been on all night.

"Pray for Leonardo and his family! Pray he will be there for the studies (now two days a week in the evening), that he will hear and believe the Word, that hope of escape will be born in his heart, and that he will be saved.

"CESI (Study Course for Church Planters): We have started an intensive Bible course here, two Saturdays a month from 4 to 8 pm, for twenty months. Saturday we had our first class session, with over thirty people from six congregations! The previous Saturday we had an orientation meeting and were pleased to have seventeen people, but the first class far surpassed our expectation. We have students who are driving over an hour to be present! Pray that the classes would be profitable, practical and edifying, and pray that the students will be faithful, with zero desertions between

now and graduation. Pray also that their churches would be helped and blessed, capturing a vision to multiply.

"Thank you for standing with us!"
Steve and Linda

Greetings from Tonala,

In the middle of May we plan on moving back to Atotonilco. At that time I will have finish my Spanish classes. I have been encouraged with the language but still struggle and stumble over my words at times. The Lord is ever so gracious with me. Sometimes I wonder why He puts up with my inability, but I'm reminded often that He will never forsake us nor will His love ever fail us. He uses us in spite of ourselves.

The other day I was asked to minister on the Lord's supper. The day before I was to speak, I was getting a little stressed out when Larry Gallegos walked in the house. He saw that I was preparing; and realizing I was feeling a little stressed, said, "Hey there's no pressure, just make sure you get it right."

I laughed and realized the only pressure I was receiving was the pressure I was placing on myself. The meeting went well even though I was sweating bullets.

On the homefront we are all doing well. A few months ago the Lord added a little baby boy named Dillon James Drysdale. He sure is a bundle of joy to us. As far as Nicole and Kaylyn are concerned, he is a keeper. They love to play with him and are like two little mother hens. On the other hand, my son Caleb, who is two-years-old, thinks he makes a great trampoline. This morning he climbed into his crib and started pouncing on him like he was tiger.

On a more serious note, Nicole has been battling with ear problems. She has trouble hearing and her hearing is declining. We had seen several doctors. None were not able to find out why she's not hearing well. The last doctor we saw had the equipment and diagnosed the problem. He administered some tests and gave her the proper medicine. She's starting to turn the bend, but we would covet your prayers on knowing how to proceed from here.

Abby is beginning to look forward to the upcoming year with excitement and apprehension. She's looking forward to being more of a part of the ministry with the ladies and youth in Atotonilco; but she has also decided to homeschool Nicole next year, and that's where the

apprehension comes in. When she thinks of adding that to her other duties, she feels overwhelmed. Please keep her in your prayers. She doesn't believe that teaching and discipline are her strong points.

As for me, I would appreciate your prayers regarding the language and that the Lord would show me how I could be effectively used when we move back to Atotonilco, and that I would be a blessing to Steve, Linda and Josh.

I would also ask that you would pray for a teacher named Gabby. The Lord has opened doors with her. She has allowed me to read the Bible to her in class. She is very open to hearing more, but lacks faith and consequently has many doubts. When she was young she saw a lot of hypocrisy among the priests and doesn't attend church for that reason. However, she still clings to some of the traditions.

Just recently the Lord dropped an unexpected surprise in my lap. Gabby's mother went to see the movie, "The Passion of Christ," last week and requested her to ask me where there is a Christian church because she would like to go. Please pray for Gabby and her mom. I believe the Lord is drawing both of them and know that the enemy would love to destroy the work. Please pray the Lord will capture their hearts and give them the faith to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Dear Saints,

It looks like in about five weeks I will be heading back to Dallas. Please pray that Ed or Steve could follow up the people with whom I have been spending time. When I think about leaving, it feels like there is much work to be done in the lives of the few people with whom I have been meeting.

Pray that they would come around to the Sunday meeting and that Steve and Ed would have the time to spend with them.

There are three families in Cucarachas that have a lot of interest in the Bible. There is a man named Miguel that works at the hotel where the campaign was held last year. There is Juan who comes from Guadalajara once a week. A young man named Chano just started having Bible studies with me on Saturdays. Another young man named Gera met with me last Friday and says that he wants to continue meeting to study the Bible. Please lift these up in prayer because it is only God who is able to change lives.

Love, Peter

THE GOD OF SMALL COMFORT

By Steve Montgomery

“Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world,” declared James in Acts 15. This was no profound revelation, but rather a stating of the obvious in order to draw a corresponding conclusion. No voice in the room was raised against such an evident, elementary statement.

Not then.

Today, however, such a declaration would incite some to call for qualifiers.

These voices would tell us, ‘Known to God are all his works from the past to the present, but that doesn’t mean He knows the future!’

Open Theism, a doctrinal position receiving increasing acceptance in certain Christian circles, posits this idea: ***God doesn’t know the future.*** According to this argument, since men are free moral agents, free to make decisions in accord with or contrary to God’s will, the future does not yet exist. Since it does not exist, it cannot be known.

The proponents of this position, some as well known as popular author Phillip Yancey, look for Biblical confirmation by turning a simple principle of Bible interpretation on its head: They ask to let the narrative portions of the Bible reinterpret the didactic (or teaching) portions. For example, in Genesis 22:12, when Abraham is about to offer Isaac in sacrifice, God intervenes, stating “Now I know that thou fearest me.” Now, they say, and not before. God literally held His breath to see how Abraham would respond, and not until the event actually occurred did God know how Abraham would act. When God says to Pharaoh, “How

long wilt thou refuse to humble thyself before me?” they conclude He is literally expressing curiosity, awaiting a response from Pharaoh. In this light, Open Theists ask us to reinterpret God’s own declaration that He knows the end from the beginning (Isaiah 46:10).

In Isaiah 5, God speaks of His vineyard, Israel. He fenced it, planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it. Having done this, He looked for it to produce grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes. Here, say Open Theists, is yet another example of God’s limited knowledge of the future. While God always knew there was a remote possibility that Israel might rebel, yet He genuinely expected the more likely outcome: that Israel would be faithful; God is truly and honestly surprised by what has happened.

Open Theists explain that, like a master chemist, God, who has infinite knowledge of the past, the present and the entire gamut of possible actions, can accurately predict how things will go, speculating with breathtaking exactitude the probable outcome of events. They hasten to add, however, that God has often been taken by surprise, that events have often gone contrary to His desire and that God has often looked back with regret to some action He took, recognizing in retrospect that it caused more problems than it solved and that, if He had it to do over again, He would do things differently. Thus, they conclude, we have the portions of Scripture that speak of God “repenting.”

You may be thinking the statements here are exaggerations

designed to strengthen arguments against Open Theism. On the contrary, listen to the words of this position’s proponents:

Concerning Israel’s rebellion, spoken of in Jeremiah 3:6-7:

“Since God is omniscient, he always knew that it was remotely possible for his people to be this stubborn, for example. But he genuinely did not expect them to actualize this remote possibility. He authentically expected that they’d be won over by his grace.” (Greg Boyd, **God of the Possible**, 51)

Concerning God’s relationship to the affairs of men:

[S]ince God does not necessarily know exactly what will happen in the future, it is always possible that even that which God in his unparalleled wisdom believes to be the best course of action at any given time may not produce the anticipated results in the long run.” (David Bassinger, **The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God**, 165)

Concerning the cross of Christ:

“Although Scripture attests that the incarnation was planned from the creation of the world, this is not so with the cross. The path to the cross comes about only through God’s interaction with humans in history. Until this moment in history, other routes were, perhaps, open. ... In Gethsemane Jesus wonders whether there is another way. But the Father and Son, seeking to accomplish the project, both come

to understand that there is no other way.” (Sanders, **The God Who Risks**, 100)

Nor is this a position of a small group debating in some obscure theological no-mans-land of heady journals and ivory-tower debates. Open Theism is now being presented to believers in mass-market trade



books and taught in Bible schools and Seminaries. A large and well-known international youth mission organization has become a major advocate of the doctrine, teaching it to thousands of young people from

all over the world. Christianity Today has spoken favorably of Open Theism as taking “the Biblical high ground” in the debate, while InterVarsity Press and Baker Books print the writings of Open Theism’s major proponents.

While a full refutation of this position is beyond the scope of this article, the problems with this view are rife:

• **The Bible interpretation is seriously flawed.**

If, for example, we are to understand Genesis 22 (with the offering of Isaac) as literally a revelation to God of something He didn’t know before, we need to ask, When did He learn? Did He only learn Abraham feared Him in the moment the knife was raised? What of Abraham’s obedience in every aspect of God’s command prior to this moment, including the trip, the declaration that he and his son would return and the statement that God would provide Himself a lamb? Did God only learn in this moment that Abraham feared Him, when Abraham’s previous actions throughout the years would seemingly provide basis for this conclusion? And what, after all, did God really learn, since He, God, cannot know the future and Abraham in the very next instance may decide to reject God’s direction?

And what of Genesis 3:9-13, where God first calls out to Adam, “Where are you?” then asks, “Have you eaten from the tree?” Here is basis, on the same principal of interpretation, to deny God’s omnipresence and His complete knowledge of the present!

• **Open Theism ignores or denies major didactic portions of Scripture:**

Though the texts for God’s

foreknowledge are numerous, consider Isaiah 41:21-29, where the Lord says in part, v21, “Produce your cause, saith the LORD; bring forth your strong *reasons*, saith the King of Jacob. v22 Let them bring *them* forth, and shew us what shall happen: let them shew the former things, what they *be*, that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them; or declare us things for to come. v23 Shew the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that ye *are* gods: yea, do good, or do evil, that we may be dismayed, and behold *it* together.”

Note that God presents as proof of deity the knowledge of future events. He challenges the false gods to prove their divine right to worship by declaring the future. This is a test which God Himself brings out. He boldly puts His deity to stand or fall on the basis of His foreknowledge. God links His praiseworthiness to His knowledge in Isaiah 42:8-9 and again asserts proof of His deity by His foreknowledge in 43:8-13, 44:6-8 and 44:24-28.

Far from the cross being a conclusion that the Father and Son decided upon in Gethsemane, Christ claimed that “all things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me,” and said unto them, Thus it is written and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day...” (Luke. 24:44-46). The cross was written of in the very first books of the Bible, according to Christ. Though Open Theists believe the cross was not planned from the beginning, Rev. 13:8 calls Christ the “Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” The God of Scripture is not the God who risks, suffering setbacks and surprises, regretting former actions and learning new things from past failures; He is, on the contrary, the One who “worketh all things after the counsel of his own will” (Ephesians 1:11).

While man is obviously responsible to God for his choices, and commanded of God to repent and believe the Gospel, yet no didactic portion of Scripture would ever lead us to believe God is taken by surprise by our choices. He is forever the One who knows the end from the beginning (Is. 46:10).

• **Open Theism leaves no basis for believing in the inspiration and authority of Scripture:**

A God who doesn’t know the future could not be absolutely sure that in every instance every writer of inspired Scripture would write exactly and unfailingly what he was to write and nothing more. In the very moment of the pen touching paper under the divine power, the man might write his own independent thought. If the argument be made that, ‘Yes, God risked, but, see, it worked! The Scripture is here as inspired!’ we have to respond, How do we know for sure? There may even have been men who simply refused the direction of God to write and whose books, therefore, never saw the light of day!

And, of course, God had no way of knowing for certain those texts would be preserved. What if the letter, sent by Paul to the Philippians by the hand of Epaphroditus, never arrived because Epaphroditus decided to forget the whole thing and go to Corinth? Were inspired letters lost because God couldn’t foresee someone trashing an epistle?

Then there is the issue of the recognition of the canon of Scripture. Perhaps Luther was right after all when he called the book of James an ‘epistle of straw’!

All of this means nothing, however, since, if God is ignorant of the future, the Scripture becomes little more than a collection of divine hopes and conjectures! We really don’t know Christ will win in the end, we really don’t know if there will even be an Anti-Christ or a millennial kingdom. We are not

even entirely sure that God, having learned that grace doesn’t really work, might not simply change His mind, repent Himself of saying Christ is the way of eternal life, and come up with a whole new plan of salvation!

But just why is a newsletter dedicated to information concerning the extension of the Gospel throughout the earth taking on, and in so brief a context, a theological issue like this?

It is addressed here because it is paramount to the health of the Church, to our confidence in the Bible, to our understanding of the Gospel and to our commitment to seeing this Gospel go out to others around us and in other cultures, that we not be deceived concerning the fact of God’s omniscience.

- If God does not know the future, then we cannot sow in hope.
- If God does not know the future, then we cannot teach the Bible in dogmatic confidence.
- If God does not know the future, we have small consolation for the cross we are embracing today.
- If God does not know the future, we have no way of knowing that in fact the Lord Jesus will finally and ultimately defeat Satan and that there will in fact be before His throne representatives from every kindred, tongue, people and nation (Revelation 5:9).

Precisely because **He does know the end from the beginning**, the God of all comfort comforts us with the assurance that the afflictions of this present time are not worthy to be compared to the glory that certainly shall be revealed at Christ’s coming, and on the basis of His firm promises, calls us to deny ourselves and take up the cross. We can confidently face the uncertain challenges of tomorrow, singing, “**I know Who holds tomorrow, and I know He holds my hand.**”

Last Chapters

by Dick York

In 1620, a little less than four hundred years ago, the pilgrims landed at Plymouth. They were a people, we are told, who were fleeing persecution in Europe and seeking a place where they could worship the Lord as they pleased, without governmental opposition or interference. That may not be an accurate representation of their circumstance.

They had fled from England for that reason, and had made their way to Holland, where they had the religious freedom that they sought. However, they found the licentious atmosphere in that land to be even more detrimental to the spiritual health of their families than the hostility that they had endured in England. In Holland their children were growing up and forsaking the Gospel for the worldly pleasures and allurements that enticed them every day. What they were seeking was a place where they could set the pace and preserve the integrity of their Christian families.

Looking at America scarcely four hundred years later, we wonder how we could have moved so far from our roots in so brief a time. The first chapter of our history opened with pious men seeking God with a mind to create a society that would glorify His name. The last chapter may well read like that of many extinct societies that rose up and then fell into oblivion before us.

The apostle Paul warned us that evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived.¹ Because he knew the Scriptures, Paul understood history, which gave him perspective on the past, and prophecy, which provided insight into the future. The declension and demise of past societies was, to him, alarmingly clear. Also clear was the fact that no society in the future would be immune to the same consequences for the same reasons.

Writing to the saints at Rome, he

set forth the Gospel in amazing detail and clarity, describing in the first chapter of his epistle the wretched state of man and the reason he needed so desperately to be saved.

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness.”²

God is not ambivalent about sin. The wrath of God against all unrighteousness is a predetermined fact. In the next several verses of this chapter, Paul describes the sad reality of the slippery slope that delivers whole societies to devastation and destruction. Man, by his very nature, knows there is a Creator; he is not by nature an atheist, he must be taught to believe there is no God. God has demonstrated His existence by the creation itself, so that man is without excuse.³

Starting with a consciousness of God, but not glorifying Him as God and being unthankful, the heart is darkened. In this state man declares himself to be wise, thereby becoming a fool, and changes the glory of the incorruptible God into the image of corruptible man or beasts or birds.⁴

“Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves.”⁵

The result is increased immorality and idolatry, where truth is abandoned and the creation becomes the object of worship rather than the Creator.⁶

“For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections; for even their women did change the natural use into that

which is against nature: and likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was [fitting].⁷

And even **as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind**, to do those things which are not convenient.⁸

When Paul wrote these words under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, it was as much an observation of the past as a prophecy of the future. This progression has been observable in every age. When God created humanity, it was so that man might be the image of the invisible God. Adam, by the exercise of his will, submitted to Satan’s lie, did not glorify God, brought forth offspring in the likeness of his now fallen nature, and the declension began. In less than two thousand years, mankind had become so grossly wicked that God thought it necessary to destroy that whole society from the face of the earth. Moses described it thusly,

*“God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was **only evil continually**. And it repented the Lord that he had made man in the earth, and it grieved him at his heart.*

“And the Lord said, ‘I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth...’.”⁹

Notice the problem: **every imagination...was only evil...continually**. Man had reached the epitome of wickedness. His thought

processes, from which all behavior emanates, were profoundly corrupt. When God gave them up to a reprobate mind, judgment and destruction was the result. Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord, and he was made righteous in his generation.¹⁰ As a result of his faith and obedience, the window of humanity was spared through which the promised Redeemer and the generations of the redeemed were to be preserved.

About eight hundred and fifty years after the flood, Ham’s descendants, the Canaanites, had turned their back’s on Noah’s God and, as the antediluvian society had done, descended into those gross behaviors that God said were abominable: bestiality and homosexuality were common place among them. For these sins God purposed to drive them from the land and give it to Abraham’s seed. It was those sins that brought God’s judgment and the demise of their society.¹¹

Before them, the men of Sodom brought destruction upon themselves by their wicked perverted sexual behavior.¹² Through their fame, to this day, the sin of homosexual behavior is labeled “sodomy.” The people of the Benjamite city Gibeah, acting as the Sodomites had done, brought the disgust and judgment of the other eleven tribes upon themselves and were destroyed.

Outside the biblical narrative is the history of the Roman Empire, which, at its end, was morally bankrupt. **Vile affections** (the words Paul used in Romans 1 to describe lesbianism and male homosexuality) was no longer considered aberrant, but a normal alternate lifestyle. As in the doomed societies before it, that symptom marked its last chapter, the final plunge into oblivion.

When Paul wrote to the saints in Rome, they must have been able to detect already the things he



was speaking about; it must have seemed appalling to them, watching the perverted lifestyles of men and women in the society becoming more acceptable each day. Now, through the instruction of Paul, they could understand what was happening; God was giving them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things that were not convenient [contrary to nature].¹³

Now, it seems, it is our turn to try to defy the laws of God and of nature. Our society is the latest to raise its puny fist in the face of Almighty God and declare itself immune to God's inescapable judgment. Because we have been conditioned by "science falsely so called"¹⁴ at every grade level in our public education system to believe that there can be a creation without a creator, and that man is accountable only to himself, there is no longer a fear of God. The Word of God, which is the power by which all things were created and by which all things consist, has been relegated to the status of superstition and mythology, taken seriously by none who profess themselves to be wise.

Thirty four percent of the public has agreed that homosexual "marriage" is an acceptable practice, and any law that would oppose it is unconstitutional because it discriminates against a legitimate segment of our society. Behavior that was considered aberrant forty years ago because the Bible declares it so, is now considered a normal lifestyle by a sizeable enough minority to sway the legal system of our land.

Men of reprobate mind, with demonic cleverness, stack our

judiciary with liberal judges who will do their bidding while prohibiting the appointment of men of character who would uphold the rule of law. Our courts are no longer governed by stable constitutional law, but by men whose decisions reflect their own opinions based upon neither law nor common sense.

As in the societies before ours that have come into being, flourished and faded to extinction, America, as well as other nations of the present world, have failed to learn the lesson of history. The Scriptures say,

"Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD; and the people whom he hath chosen for his own inheritance.¹⁵ Happy is that people, that is in such a case: yea, happy is that people, whose God is the LORD."¹⁶ and "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God."¹⁷

The regression of Romans 1 is clearly stamped upon our nation's recent history. I remember the incredulity with which the charts, pictures and articles articulating Darwin's theory of evolution were met seventy years ago when I first attended school. The local newspaper published such a chart in a weekend edition. My brother and sister, who were in middle school and high school respectively, were mocking the insanity of such a theory; it was a joke to them in a day when the Bible was still considered the "good book," and its content important, even in school. Can you imagine a public high school student today even questioning the validity of such a theory, even though it defies the proven laws of nature?

I understand, of course, that we are wiser now; too wise to worship the Creator, now we have learned to worship the creation. Our Bible is no longer the one that says, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth," now it is a bumper sticker that reads, "Be kind to your mother," meaning, of course, the

earth.

They knew God ... glorified Him not as God ... their foolish heart was darkened ... professing themselves to be wise, they became fools. God gave them up to uncleanness to dishonor their own bodies. They worshiped and served the creation more than the Creator; God gave them up to vile affections, i.e. lesbianism and homosexuality. They didn't like to retain God in their knowledge; He gave them over to a reprobate mind. And that's where we are.

So compelling is this drive, so advanced is this agenda, that even declarations by governors and Attorneys General cannot dissuade local city and county governments from issuing marriage licenses by the thousands to same-sex couples in cities large and small in many segments of our nation: first Boston, then San Francisco, Albuquerque, Portland and on to other communities until a state of anarchy exists.

Having created in our schools a generation in whose eyes there is no fear of God, and then, through entertainment and the media, corrupting their morals and perverting their view of sex, we now present to them as just, the condition that God abhors the most.

Sadly, even in what the world regards as the church, an institution they think represents God's truth, "pastors" and "bishops" male and female are "marrying" their same sex partners endorsing—even setting the standard—for their "Christian" communities. No doubt they will have many eager disciples. If God judged previous societies with destruction, can we hope for any better? Because we, true believers who are also offended by this satanic trend, are also citizens of this apostatizing nation, what can we do?

Thankfully Paul's Roman epistle does not stop at Chapter 1; it goes on to present God's solution to this horrendous problem. The Gospel "*is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek [Gentile].*"¹⁸ God is not surprised by

the wickedness of our generation. His solution was provided from before the foundation of the world. It is we, the Church, to whom God has committed the Gospel. It is the same message that delivered us from this present evil world.¹⁹ In the United States, although the apostasy is advancing and the balance is shifting, there are still as many of *us* as there are of *them*. **Our message is still the power of God unto salvation. The solution is in our hands. We have the weapon of prayer, which God has commanded us to use;²⁰ and we have the message of the Truth, the sword of the Spirit, which God has told us to wield.²¹**

We need to pull on our army boots and march off to war. And what are our army boots? **The preparation of the Gospel of peace.²² We have the Gospel, we need to prepare ourselves to use it.** At this point in our history, **we cannot afford any longer to be reticent about preaching the Gospel or reluctant about prayer.** We may or may not see the trend reversed, because we know from the Word that eventually the nations will fall, but we are a part of a giant rescue operation. It is the **Gospel** that will deliver multitudes from the wrath to come, and even more important, will glorify the Lord Jesus as He seeks a people for His name from among the Gentiles.²³ **The hour is late, but it's not too late.** How will our last chapter unfold?

(Endnotes)

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| ¹ 2 Timothy 3:13 | ¹³ Romans 1:28 |
| ² Romans 1:18 | ¹⁴ 1 Timothy 6:20,21 |
| ³ Romans 1:19,20 | ¹⁵ Psalm 33:12 |
| ⁴ Romans 1:21-23 | ¹⁶ Psalm 44:15 |
| ⁵ Romans 1:24 | ¹⁷ Psalm 9:17 |
| ⁶ Romans 1:25 | ¹⁸ Romans 1:16 |
| ⁷ Romans 1:26,27 | ¹⁹ Galatians 1:4 |
| ⁸ Romans 1:28 | ²⁰ 1 Timothy 2:1-3 |
| ⁹ Genesis 6:5-7 | ²¹ Ephesians 6:17 |
| ¹⁰ Genesis 6:8,9 | ²² Ephesians 6:15 |
| ¹¹ Deuteronomy 12:31 | ²³ Acts 15:14 |
| ¹² Genesis 19:13,24 | |

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The Annual SFMI Memorial Day weekend Conference is only weeks away, Friday, May 28 through Monday May 31.

If you missed the registration form in the last newsletter, please call (541) 382-7081 immediately, or write to SFMI, P.O. Box 144, Bend, Oregon 97701, or e-mail sfmi@sfmiusa.org. Whichever you do, do it right away. We are expecting another full house, and we don't want to miss seeing you there.



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