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by Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

The Reflector

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“Whittling at God’s End of the Stick”

Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

I often use the above expression, but I confess that I borrowed it many years ago from brother Robert Turner. He never told me where he got it. Whatever the origin, it is a good expression.

God has revealed his word for us in terms that are, generally speaking, easy to understand. Although some things are admittedly hard to understand. As Peter stated concerning Paul’s writings, even in things hard to understand, we still have the responsibility to not wrest them to our destruction. The “unlearned” and “unstable” are not excused from responsibility of handling the Scriptures aright because it may be a more difficult portion than others. (See 2 Pet. 3:16).

Jesus has given us the responsibility to teach people “to observe *all* things whatsoever (he) has commanded (us).” (Matt. 28:20). I have no right to give anyone a pass on anything the Lord has commanded. I have no right to preach anything short of giving all “diligence to make your calling and election sure” by doing what he has commanded (2 Pet. 1:10). I must preach that whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law. So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.” (Jas. 2:10-12). Notice that the “law” he is talking about is the “law of liberty” – the law we are to look into and do (Jas. 1:25). I must teach that we must love, trust, and obey God with all our hearts. I must tell folks of the command to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord (2 Pet. 3:18).

I also must teach that we have a faithful Savior, a High Priest, an Advocate that we can trust to help in time of need. (Cf. Heb. 4:16; 1 John 2:1). He has promised not to allow us to be tempted beyond our ability and even make a way of escape for us (1 Cor. 10:13). It is up to us to take that way of escape. I must teach that He has promised that those who continue in his word will know the truth and will be made free (John 8:31-33) and “If anyone wants to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God ... (John 7:17 NKJV). I must teach that all Christians sin and that if they confess their sins that they will be forgiven (1 John 1:7-10).

All of that is whittling at our end of the stick.

Now for whittling at God’s end of the stick.

Determining whether one has known enough, loved enough, trusted enough, obeyed enough, or grown enough is “God’s end of the stick.” It is not for me to “judge the law” (as to any points of law I think one can ignore or can be ignorant of, and to what extent and still please God) but I am to be a doer of it (Jas. 4:11) and to teach others to do likewise.

We are sometimes asked, “How can one feel happy and secure while being taught that we must obey “all things” he has commanded – when we know that we not perfect? The answer is to trust the promises of our Savior, High Priest, and Advocate that we described above. The law of Christ was written to be obeyed or, to put it another way, “that ye sin not.” But it is also written to tell us of the remedy for sin when we do sin. (1 John 1:7-2:1). Our security rests with Christ, his mercy, and his promises and not any supposed right we may think

we have to determine which sins or class of sins his grace will or will not cover when we fall short. We trust that he is not willing that any should perish and that he will do all possible to keep us from it; and, as promised, faithful and just to forgive us when we confess (including repenting) our sins. ■

The Truth of God

Philip North

The truth of God will never alter,
Nor can her contents ever falter

Eternal life is in truth's pages,
No matter how much Satan rages

You see, this is the "good book" here,
Containing God's truth e'er so dear!

Our Maker said, "I change not!"
We'd better heed those words a lot

For 'tis the truth that sets you free,
Not creeds of *man*! Oh! Can't you see?

If Heaven is to be your home,
Then house right under truth's hard dome

Truth caters not to man's emotions,
Like fickle waters in earth's great oceans

Emotions oft vary dusk to sun,
But *truth* stays pat, never to run

Do *love* this truth from God's great Word,
Such is the greatest ever heard

The truth originated from love,
Thus, issues from Jehovah above

Truth is the biggest and best foundation,
As only truth can net salvation

Wisdom births when truth is got,

Hence, cast not anchor where she's not

Truth is the Haven, truth is the Cleft,
Truth is all Safety, when nought is left

To spurn the truth means you loathe God,
So, speak truth in *all* roads that's trod

Since God is sinless all the way,
Keep His truth in your heart each day

Love *all* the truth in that great Bible,
Or ere your Lord you'll be most liable

As well, *obey* this truth, of course,
So at the last, there's no remorse

Truth makes life happier here on earth,
Through all the sadness, joy, and mirth

Thus, not just in the life to come,
Will truth beat smoothly on her drum

Take truth to heart, take truth to soul,
As truth makes all of your life whole

Much is this writer's earnest prayer,
That every *root* of truth, you'll care!

One day, you'll die, and meet the Lord!
Will *truth* then have been your accord?

If you shunned truth, *error* you did board,
The price you'll pay, you can't afford!

So make the truth your greatest friend,
She's best for you at your life's end

Embrace truth as you would true love,
So you can rest your soul above ■

And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall
make you free. (John 8:32 KJV)

That They All May Be One

H. E. Phillips

No more wonderful prayer was ever uttered than that of Christ just a little while before he was to purchase the church with his blood on the cross. As he gathered around him the chosen disciples, he prayed earnestly on their behalf for unity among them. That prayer does not go altogether unanswered, as some suppose, for there is unity among those who abide in the teaching of Christ. I do not mean that all those who call upon the name of the Lord are of one accord, nor do I mean that all in the church of the Lord are in perfect unity. The main difference is what Jesus prayed for and conditions today is in division over not abiding in his Word. Where any two men abide in the teaching of Christ it is impossible for them to be at variance with one another, because what his Word says to one it says to the other. When one obeys a given commandment of Christ, and another obeys that same command, there is no way for them to be at variance.

Here is a part of the prayer of Jesus. “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me” (Jn. 17:20,21).

Several things are to be noticed in this petition. First, that not only the disciples present, but also all who believe on Christ through the word given to these disciples were to be one. The oneness grows out of the word of Christ. Unity can never be had on the speculations of men. What Christ has not taught cannot bring unity, neither can one follow his conception of a theory and be a unity with disciples of Christ. Christ did not pray that his disciples should be one while each believes what he wants to and lives according to his own theory.

Just because a man obeys the gospel of Christ and is added to his church, is no basis that all Christians should tolerate any notion he may invent regarding religion, or that all should be at unity

with him in his innovations. Christ did not pray that “all Christians” should be at unity regardless of what each may believe and practice, but he qualified that unity by these words: “As thou Father, art in me, and I in thee.” Now, unity among disciples must be the same kind of unity that exists between the Father and Christ. If not that kind of unity, Christ did not pray for them to be “unionized.” The Father and Christ exactly agreed in all things. Amos says: “Can two walk together except they be agreed?” (Amos 3:3) The answer is evident. Unity, as Christ prayed for it, demands agreement and that upon his Word.

The common error of preachers pleading for unity is that they want unity on other grounds than the Word of God. And they say all are guilty of causing division contrary to the prayer of Christ who do not agree. Christ did not pray for unity among disciples on any basis except his Word.

Just two chapters back John records these words of Christ: “I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me” (John 15:1-4). Now, is not this the real basis of unity, rather than the union of all who call themselves “Christians”? Christ said: “Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.” That is what makes men clean. Then he continues: “Abide in me, and I in you.” Unity among disciples can only come by all abiding in Christ. That is what Christ prayed for.

1 Corinthians 1:10 makes clear this same principle of unity. Paul admonishes the Christians here to “speak the same thing.” Certainly to speak the same thing they must be agreed; and to be agreed and speak the same thing they must speak

the word of God, not their own ideas (1 Pet. 4:11). The division in Corinth was caused by men following other men rather than the word of Christ. Division does not come by following the Word of God, but by following men who oppose the teachings of Christ.

Now as to the plea to “fellowship” those who do not abide in the doctrine of Christ. The “isms,” “antis,” “aids,” etc., can not bring unity, nor did Christ pray that these be unified with disciples who follow his Word. The word of Christ does not produce such schisms of any sort and when two people “abide in the true vine, “ there can be no schisms. These divisions come by someone being untrue to the word of Christ, and remember, Christ prayed for unity upon his word, not various ideas.

Christ did not teach any such doctrine as “Premillennialism,” and when a child of God apostatizes into that “ism,” it is not possible for unity, even though the two shake hands and profess unity. Unity is the speaking the same thing, and that the word of God. Christ did not pray for unity among Premillennialists and faithful children of God. He did not pray for unity among children of God when some of them “go after other gods” such as mechanical instrumental music in the worship to God. He prayed for unity among disciples of Christ who believe on him through his word. They must abide in his word for unity to prevail. His word does not teach “missionary societies” and “instrumental aids” in worship, therefore, he did not pray for unity among people on these points.

Inspiration gave us the way to treat those who “walk not uprightly according to the truth.” Paul, an apostle of Christ, taught unity just as Christ did, yet he had this to say in the Roman letter: “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned: and avoid them” (Rom. 16:17). Does this sound like Paul was calling for unity at the expense of truth? Notice: “Mark them which cause divisions.” Division comes when people do not follow the word of Christ; the word is the basis of unity. Also he said: “and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and

avoid them. “ There is no fellowship for those who teach offensive doctrines which Christ did not teach. Let us not fool ourselves, unity cannot come when two are not agreed. The word of God is the basis of unity, not our opinions.

One more passage. “If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him Godspeed; for he that biddeth him Godspeed is partaker of his evil deeds” (2 John 10,11). Does this sound like unity in spite of truth? There can be no unity on conjecture and theory. One who does not teach the doctrine of Christ, minus the contaminating influence of human wisdom, cannot be fellowshipped according to the Scripture, neither can there be unity on this foundation. Christ’s prayer did not include unity by this standard, but only upon his word. Christ does not want unity among men at the expense of truth. The prayer of Christ is answered when men come to the unity he prayed for upon his word and his word alone. Even if one succeeded in bringing a few together, some believing premillennialism, some instrumental music in the worship, some societies and aids, some “anti,” and have them shake hands in fellowship, there is no unity. Unity demands the speaking the same thing, being agreed, upon the word of God. (Note: the term “anti” was generally applied in the 1940s to those who opposed the located preacher and Bible classes.) ■

Slaves of Obedience ...

It is kind of ironical that some labor so hard trying to convince us that freedom in Christ frees us from being slaves to obedience (or rule keeping) use Romans 6:14 as one of their proof texts when only two verses down we are declared to be slaves of obedience. Note Romans 6:14-16:

“14 For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace. 15 What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! 16 Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?” (Romans 6:14-16) - EB