



The Reflector

Published and edited monthly in the interest of calling people back to the Bible
by Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

January 2015

Know the Unknowable?

James W. Adams

For one to assume that he knows the unknowable in religion is the greatest ignorance and the grossest presumption and arrogance. True indeed is the statement, "Wisdom is knowing when you cannot be wise" (Paul Engle). Some have erroneously concluded that Revelation precludes mysteries. To us finite human beings, the omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent, absolutely perfect God revealed in the Bible, being infinite, of necessity must be incomprehensible in many aspects of His nature and operations. Only that knowledge of God which is necessary to enable humans to glorify Him in their present earthly environment and to fit them to live with Him eternally in the world to come is revealed in the Bible. To perfectly comprehend God in His nature and operations one would have to be Deity himself. The most perfect revelation of God to man is Jesus Christ and His teaching as set forth in the New Testament.

Recognizing man's inability to comprehend perfectly and to be able to explain and vindicate God's nature and operations, Moses said, "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong to us and our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law" (Deut 29:29). Jesus voiced the same sentiment when he said, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father has put in his own power" (Acts 1:6). Paul enlarges on the matter by saying, "Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels,

preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory," (1 Timothy 3:16). When Paul wrote, these facts had become matters of revelation, but in Old Testament times they were mysteries of Messianic prophecy. In the Bible usage of the term, any unrevealed thing is a mystery. All of this is noted to emphasize the fact that there are things about God which are not clearly revealed to us, hence are mysteries. The silence of God in reference to such matters must be respected. This precludes speculation and fruitless and divisive wrangling.

What theologians call, "The Incarnation," i.e. the fleshly manifestation of the Eternal Word in the person of Jesus (John 1:1-4, 14), has been the occasion of endless controversy beginning in the second century. Arius was probably the most able and vocal of the "church fathers" who denied that Jesus was deity. His famous confrontation with Alexander at the Council of Nice (325 AD) resulted in the official acceptance of the "doctrine of the Trinity" and the condemnation of "Arianism."

Since then, until now, there have been endless controversies over speculative theories concerning the interaction of Deity and humanity in the person of Jesus. Most of them have been futile exercises in semantics and/or nebulous vagaries of human imagination growing out of man's presumption of a knowledge of the unknowable.

The Bible speaks of the "Godhead or Godhood" (Romans 1:20). It says nothing of the "Trinity" or of "hooomasia [Gk. "of the same essence"]. It further teaches that Jesus was God (John 1:1-4, 14;

8:58; 19:7). It also teaches that Jesus was a man, human, having all the normal characteristics of a human except that he lived above and without sin (John 3:5; Hebrews 4:14-16). He was the Son of Man and the Son of God. Why not teach what the Bible says about his person without feeling the necessity of explaining whatever in his nature and functions seem to be at variance with human analogies?

If God had wanted us to have this knowledge, no doubt he would have revealed it unto us. Our logical (?) deductions concerning the nature of Deity derived from statements of Divine Revelation are flawed by the limitations of human experience and the incapacity of human analogies. While I do not accept many of the aspects of Soren Kierkegaard's existential philosophy, the following excerpt from his writings expresses a basic fact which all Bible students should recognize; namely, "No analogy perfectly accords with evangelical fact" (Training in Christianity, p. 66).

No human analogy known to me can make three one and one three, yet this is what the Bible teaches concerning the Godhead, and I believe and teach it. No analogy can explain how the man Jesus could be at the same time God and man and maintain both his Godhood and his manhood while he fulfilled all that the Bible says he came to accomplish and did accomplish. Yet, I believe and teach all the Bible says without fully understanding the how of the matter. One does not have to understand a fact to believe it. I do not understand fully the workings of a computer, but I am using one.

Brethren, let us quit arguing about the unknowable and keep on preaching what we know. All people of accountable years - who have their right minds are sinners and condemned to eternal ruin. Salvation can only be had through Jesus Christ and the blood he shed for our redemption. No person can be saved on the grounds of his works or his obedience, for both are flawed by his fallibility. The grounds of our salvation are the grace, mercy and love of God and the shed blood of Jesus Christ. Salvation is conditional. The alien

sinner must believe, repent, confess Christ with the mouth, and be immersed in water to be saved from past sins. The baptized believer must be faithful to Christ (i.e. continue to be a "believer" in the Bible sense of that term) in order to go to heaven. If he sins, he must repent, confess, and ask God through Christ to forgive him. All of this we know, and can teach with confidence, and have so taught for many years.

What God may or may not do beyond this in response to human contingencies is unknowable, hence to teach anything in this area is to invade the realm of God's awful silence. We need to heed the words of God as quoted by the Psalmist, "Be still! and know that I am God." ■

Lauren King and Women Preachers

Victor M. Eskew

Women are being used in roles, which, in times past, were filled exclusively by men: serving on the Lord's table, leading public prayers, leading singing, being elders, deacons, and preachers in pulpits.

In the long ago, Moses warned Israel with these words: "When thou art come into the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not learn to do after the abominations of those nations" (Deut. 18:9). God did not want His people to become like the Canaanites. He gave them His law so they could be a people set apart for His holy purposes.

A New Testament admonition that is similar to the one given by Moses on the banks of the Jordan is found in Romans 12:2. Paul writes: "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God." Paul told the saints in Rome: "Do not let the world mold you." Instead, they were to be radically altered through their adherence to the Word of God. Again, God's precepts were to separate His people from the world so they can carry out God's divine purposes.

Over the last 50 years, God's people have not

been content with the practice of holiness as outlined in God's Word. We no longer desire to be different —to be strange. We have become like Israel of old and desire to be like the nations around us (1 Sam. 8:4-5). Our speech, our dress, our behaviors, and our worship look almost exactly like the world. When worldly concepts are introduced into our churches, it seems that many people love to have it so (Jer. 5:21).

One of the moves that many brethren have made over the last several years concerns the role of women in the church. Women are being used in roles, which, in times past, were filled exclusively by men: serving on the Lord's Table, leading public prayers, leading singing, being elders, deacons, and preachers in pulpits. One of the most recent cases is found in the Fourth Avenue Church of Christ in Franklin, Tennessee. They have hired a young lady named Lauren King to assist as a "preaching minister" for the congregation. Recently (11/23/2014), she presented her first lesson to the church on a Lord's Day morning. A video made the rounds through social media about this new "minister" for the church on Fourth Avenue. This video reveals more to us than just the fact that a woman is preaching in the pulpit. In this article, we want to discuss some of the things that were said and how God's holy Word is being mocked and defied by Miss King and the Fourth Avenue Church.

One of the things that Lauren said is that the Lord has "made it clear" that while in college at **David Lipscomb University** she needed to pick up a preaching emphasis in her training. One thing that needs to be asked is: "How did the Lord make this clear to Miss King?" We know that God has made known His will in the pages of the Bible. She did not hear the Lord's voice from the Bible telling her to pick up a preaching emphasis. In fact, had she listened to God's Word, she would have heard just the opposite. The New Testament instructs women with these words: "But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence" (1 Tim. 2:12).

Lauren does give us a little insight as to how

she perceives the Lord's voice. She says that she knows the Lord's voice when she has "peace when I walk through open doors." In essence, she is saying that as long as her conscience is clear when she does things, then she believes God's voice is approving her actions. Lauren needs to take some lessons from Saul of Tarsus about this approach to God's approval. When Christianity burst onto the scene on Pentecost Day in Jerusalem, Saul was a faithful Jew. He had steadfastly obeyed the Law of Moses all of his life (Phil. 3:4-5). In his zeal for the Law of Moses, he persecuted the church of Christ (Acts 9:1-2; Phil. 3:6). In Acts 23:1, we learn that this Jewish zealot never suffered the sting of conscience in all that he did. "And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day." Saul always had peace of mind in all that he did, even when he was disobedient to God. A feeling of peace deep within does not indicate that God approves of one's actions. If this were the standard, then every person who is religious would be acceptable to God. Lauren King has accepted a false standard of authority that will cause her to be lost in the last day if she continues to accept it as her guide.

Miss King makes another argument to justify her public proclamation of God's Word. This argument is based upon the talents that God has given to each person. She reasons that if God has given you a talent, then He has called you to put that talent into action. On its surface, this argument sounds reasonable to those who have heard of the Parable of the Talents found in Matthew 25:14-30. The problem is that Lauren fails to understand that God has limited "where" she can use her talents. Lauren is free to use her talents teaching children, teenage girls, and women. She is not free to use her talents to teach men in the assembly. "Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law" (1 Cor. 14:34). God is the one who is in charge. He has the right to put restrictions on our abilities if he so

desires. Just because a person has a talent does not mean he/she can use it at any time and in any place (See 1 Cor. 14:27-28).

Lauren is not the only person in error in this matter. The elders, the preacher(s), and the members at Fourth Avenue are all at fault as well. In the video, **Patrick Mead** (senior minister at Fourth Avenue), defends having Lauren there as a preaching minister. He says that the things that were written to the church at Corinth and the church at Ephesus regarding women, addressed temporary issues. In essence, he says the things written about the silence of women applied then, but does not apply today. In the video, he does not say how he came to this conclusion. Whatever his arguments are, he is wrong.

In 1 Timothy 2:13-14, the apostle Paul gives two reasons why a woman is NOT to usurp authority over the man. Neither reason has anything to do with the cultural issues and problems in Corinth and Ephesus. Paul teaches: "For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression." God delegated authority and oversight responsibilities in both the home and the church to men. He based this upon the order of creation and the sin that was committed in the Garden of Eden. It has nothing, nothing, to do with first century culture.

In the video, Lauren King affirms: "Jesus is calling us to change." Where does she read this in the New Testament? Jesus doesn't call us to change. He calls us to obedience. "Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed" (John 8:31). In John 14:15, the Son of God says: "If ye love me, keep my commandments." In John 14:23, He says: "If a man love me, he will keep my words..."

The only change Jesus wants from man involves his heart (Luke 13:3,5). It's called repentance. He wants all men to yield their hearts to the will of God just as He did in Gethsemane (Luke 22:40-44). He never approved the substitution of human tradition for the

commandments of God (Matt. 15:1-9).

Dear readers, let us not be tempted to follow in the footsteps of Lauren King and the Fourth Avenue church in Franklin, Tennessee. ■

A Popular God

Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

Paul, in describing the course taken by the nations (Gentiles) away from God, whom they once knew and worshiped, said they "changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man – and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things." (Romans 1:23 NKJV)

Few of us today know anyone who fashions a piece of wood, a block of silver or gold or stone, or other material into the physical image of himself or any other person, and worships it as god. The idolatry that most folks we know is that of creating their own subjective image of God and worshipping it. Their god varies greatly from the God of the Bible.

A more popular god created in the minds of many is one ...

1. That offers salvation on their terms.
2. That looks only at man's heart without regard to his actions.
3. That allows them to live as they please without ramifications.
4. That allows them to choose a church that best meets their perceived needs.
5. That expects that church to accept them as they are without question.
6. That accepts anything that they think appropriate as worship to him.
7. That wants them to vocally praise his name without regard to obeying his authority.
8. That wants them to be happy above all other considerations.
9. That will not allow them to go to an eternal hell, no matter what.

Is this the god that you serve? Is this the God of the Bible? ■