



The Reflector

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

July 2017

The Gap Between the Real and The Ideal

Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

Since we live in an imperfect environment, there is always a gap between the real and the ideal — between things as they are and as they ought to be.

All responsible people sin, even Christians (Romans 3:10,11,21; 1 John 1:8,10). Paul described his struggle with sin while under the law (of Moses) in Romans 7:14-25. His conflict is typical of every conscientious person's struggle to bridge the gap between the real and the ideal.

We know all too well that while there are a lot of *good* people, there are no absolutely *perfect* people. There are many good marriages, good churches, good businesses — but no perfect ones.

People make a variety of attempts, good and bad, to cope with the gap between things as they are and things as we know they ought to be.

To some, the solution is to *abolish the ideal*. These deny that there is a perfect or ideal standard to which man is to be held accountable

There is a perfect standard for living in the world — the Holy Scriptures (2 Timothy 3:16,17). This standard is called “the perfect law of liberty” (James 1:25). We are expected to look into it and to measure and correct our lives by it. Many, who do not deny it outright, pervert and water it down until it is meaningless as a perfect standard of living. (Cf. Gal. 1:8,9).

To many, the solution is to *accept the real without improvement*. These are aware of their imperfections. They freely acknowledge their sinfulness. Yet, they have no desire to correct

themselves. While a Christian must not wilfully continue in sin (Rom. 6:1; Heb. 10:26), he does sin from time to time. He knows that as he sins he must correct the matter by obeying God's conditions for forgiveness. (1 John 1:7-9).

There are many areas in our lives where we fall short of the ideal, so we must continue to press on toward perfection. (Hebrews 5:12-6:1; 2 Peter 3:17,18; Philippians 3:12-15). Yet, there are many who resist improvement. They are kind of like country comedienne Minnie Pearl's brother. She said “Brother is no failure, he just started at the bottom and liked it there.” Many Christians, so-called, show no desire to improve their spiritual skills.

To others, the solution is to *abandon the struggle for the ideal*. The great apostle, Paul, knew that he had not yet attained the ideal for which he had been struggling so long, but he kept right on striving. He said, “Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.” (Philippians 3:12).

Many abandon the struggle for the ideal within themselves. They know they have not reached perfection and are not likely to in this life, so they cease all efforts to improve the moral and spiritual quality of their lives. They may accept the status quo and drift along, satisfied with their present level of development, without any further effort to improve. Or they may turn to some form of escapism, such as substance abuses and hedonism, trying to avoid the

pressure to improve their lives. Some even turn to suicide to get away from what they consider a hopeless struggle.

Many forsake the struggle for the ideal in their personal relationships. Since their families, their jobs, and their brethren are not ideal, they just walk off and leave them. Or, as often happens, they jump out of one relationship into another in an endless search for the ideal marriage, ideal job or ideal congregation until they finally realize there are no completely ideal situations; and that they must take their imperfect predicament and try to improve upon it or they become so dejected that they virtually become dropouts from life.

To still others, the solution is to *patiently strive for the ideal*. A Christian works on himself to that end. He strives to avoid sin, yet he does sin, so he repents, asks God's forgiveness, and tries again. (Cf. 1 John 2:1-3). He works within his various personal relationships to bring them ever-closer to the ideal.

A good sister may be married to a non-Christian. This is not an ideal situation, but rather than leave it, she patiently sets the proper example of a Christian before her skeptical husband, hoping to influence him to obey the Lord. (1 Peter 3:1,2). A father has children who are far from perfect, he patiently "bring(s) them up in the training and admonition of the Lord." (Ephesians 6:4). This involves teaching and discipline.

A Christian is a member of a "less than ideal" congregation, but one in which he can remain and maintain his personal faithfulness. So he through "lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit" (Ephesians 4:3, 4), preaches the word, reproving, rebuking and exhorting with all longsuffering and teaching (2 Timothy 4:1-4). He hangs in there making improvement where and when he can.

Impatience has a tendency to wreck rather than to build ideal situations. Nagging and coercing may force external changes, but teaching changes men

from the inside out. The former may produce noticeable changes faster, but the latter produces real and lasting changes for the better. If we are not careful, our desire for instant results may cause us to lower the standard so that it can be more readily met. Impatience can also cause one to simply give up on others too quickly.

At the same time, we need to realize that patience and longsuffering have their limits. We cannot become a partaker of other men's sins in the name of patience (1 Timothy 5:22). There comes a time when stronger measures must be taken and one has to withdraw himself from those who persist in sin.

Yes, there will always be a gap between the real and ideal that must be bridged by the grace of God. We must cope with this fact. While it may be true that we will not be lost for not reaching the absolutely ideal in this life — we may very well be lost for not *reaching for it*. ■

What it Means to Be a Christian

Granville W. Tyler

Men should be constantly endeavoring to learn more about Christianity; its blessings cannot be enjoyed to the fullest without at least some knowledge of it. The Jew was born in covenant relationship with God and was afterwards taught the law, his responsibility to God, etc. But not so in this age, for one must be taught and must learn in order to become a Christian (Heb. 9:8-13; Jno. 6:44, 45); this teaching and learning must continue after he becomes a Christian that his knowledge may be increased. In the great commission Jesus commands his disciples to teach and baptize and to teach those who are baptized. (Matt. 28:19, 20) Ignorance hinders the progress of Christianity here and leads to eternal destruction hereafter. Obviously, there are mysteries connected with this profound system which the human mind can never fathom, but these have to do with the divine side, or God's part. God has revealed our duty to us in language that we can understand. It would be impossible to mention all

the misconceptions and false ideas advanced in the name of Christianity, but let us take a look at a few of them.

Many believe and teach that since God does the saving, man has nothing whatsoever to do in the matter of eternal salvation, but is absolutely passive in every respect. No Bible believer doubts for a moment that God saves, for the Bible plainly states that he does. But to draw the conclusion that God saves man unconditionally is not only farfetched, but absolutely false. "For by grace (God's part) have ye been saved through faith (man's part); and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, that no man should glory." (Eph. 2:8, 9) When people asked Christ and the inspired apostles what to do to be saved, and this was done more than once (Matt. 19:16-22; Acts 2:37, 38; 16:29-34), they, without exception, told them something to do. Who would dare say they made a mistake? Jesus said: "Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven." (Matt. 7:21) In the last book of the Bible the promise of eternal happiness is made to those who "do his commandments." (Rev. 22:16)

It is sometimes stated, and apparently believed by many, that we are not in any way under any kind of law today. We are not under the law of Moses, nor can we merit salvation by perfectly keeping any law. But to say that Christians are not under the law of Christ is to reveal a gross misunderstanding of what it really means to be a Christian. "For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and of death." (Rom. 8:2) This law of God is just as binding and immutable as are his laws controlling the material universe; the consequences of violating this law are just as certain and even more serious in effect than the violation of the other laws. The New Testament contains the law of the Christian and no man can disrespect or ignore this law and please God. "But he that looketh into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and so continueth, being not a hearer that forgetteth, but a doer that worketh, this

man shall be blessed in his doing." (Jas. 1:25) We are not only required to order lives by this law while we live, but shall be judged by it in the last day. (Jno. 12:48)

Christianity should not be thought of as a formal set or code of laws merely governing our outward acts. The principles set forth in the New Testament must reach the remote recesses of our hearts and control our thoughts and emotions. (Matt. 5:8; 15:17, 20; Phil. 4:8) All ceremonies and acts of obedience or worship must be from the heart to be acceptable to God. Notice, "But thanks be to God, that whereas ye were, servants of sin, ye became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching whereunto ye were delivered ;and being made free from sin, ye became servants of righteousness." (Rom. 6:17, 18) "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship in spirit and truth." (Jno. 4:24) Going through an outward form for baptism, the Lord's supper, giving of our means, or anything else without the proper attitude of mind or condition of heart, is to "become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal." It certainly does not follow, however, that one can have a pure heart and please God without obeying these commands. The acts commanded accompanied with sincere motives are essential; he who refuses to obey the outward acts commanded in the Bible is rebellious in the sight of God.

Some seem to hold the religion of the Bible as merely a negative system and feel that refraining from criminal action will make one a Christian. It is true that one must refrain from and be opposed to those wicked and sinful acts, but merely refusing to participate in outrageous practices is not enough to make one a Christian. He must not only cease to do evil, but must learn to do well also. In order to become a Christian one must obey certain positive commands. In Acts 10 Cornelius is pictured as one of the finest men morally you can imagine, and yet he had to hear the gospel preached, and was specifically commanded to be baptized. (Ver. 48) To Saul who had already turned away from his wicked acts, Ananias said: "And now why tarriest thou? arise and

be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on his name.” (Acts 22:16) After becoming a Christian one must move forward; he must stand for something as well as against something. Notice both the negative and the positive in Paul’s words to Titus. “For the grace of God hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to the intent that denying ungodliness and worldly lust, we should live soberly and righteously and godly in this present world.” (Tit. 2:11, 12) Christianity is a progressive system; it must be carried forward by those who march beneath its banner. “Wherefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch, as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.” (1 Cor. 15:58)

We may speak of the joy and happiness of being a Christian, but we must not overlook the responsibilities, burdens and hardships along the way. Jesus promises rest to those who take his yoke (Matt. 11:28-30), and the promise of eternal life is to those who deny themselves, take up his cross and follow him. (Matt. 16:24-27) Those who enter the Christian life feeling that they are to be carried to heaven on flowery beds of ease should sit down first and count the cost. (Lk. 14:28-33) Every Christian enjoys blessings, has hope and assurance, for which the world longs but cannot know; but he who feels that there are no persecutions, disappointments or heartaches, has a poor conception of Christian living. Hear the apostle Paul: “Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.” (2 Tim. 2:3) Again: “Fight the good fight of the faith, lay hold on the life eternal.” (1Tim. 6:12)

– *The Evangelist*, Corinth, Miss., December 11, 1941 ■

“Who Is on First?”

Greg Gwin

Abbott and Costello, the famous comedy team of the previous generation, are most remembered for their hilarious routine about baseball. It was a classic example of the confusion that results when people

aren’t communicating “on the same wave-length.” It’s not uncommon, even today, to hear people remark “who’s on first?” – an allusion to that comedy duo - when confronted with a confusing situation.

This brings to mind some lessons we need to learn - lessons concerning our efforts to teach the Bible to lost people. It is very possible that we will begin teaching folks at a level they are not prepared to receive. We ought to be careful about assuming that a student knows certain fundamentals. If we start with a faulty foundation of knowledge, we are certain to run into difficulty as we try to move our students on to the things that are “*hard to be understood*” (2 Peter 3:10). We should follow the example of Philip, who determined his student’s level of understanding and “*began at the same scripture and preached unto him Jesus*” (Acts 8:35).

We need to be sure that we are ‘using Bible words in Bible ways’. If we are careless in this matter, we are opening the door to unsound conclusions. For instance, if we talk about the birth of a baby and refer to it as a ‘miracle’, we may later be confronted by the argument that all the true Bible miracles can be dismissed with a natural explanation. A birth is, in fact, a marvelous thing, but it is not a miracle in the Biblical sense. (Only the virgin birth of Jesus would be accurately proclaimed a miracle.) So, again, we must learn to be careful with terminology.

Finally, we should be cautious about using phrases and jargon that are very familiar to us, but may leave a student in utter confusion. It would be a shame to waste a good teaching opportunity simply because we weren’t careful about analyzing our student’s ability to comprehend the message. There is a “*time when ye ought to be teachers*” (Hebrews 5:12). And good teachers *KNOW* their students.

Pray that God will help us find the good and honest hearts, and that He will give us wisdom to use every opportunity to the fullest. ■

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