

Volume 31
July 1991
NUMBER 7

FROM FULTONDALE CHURCH OF CHRIST...

The Reflector

Published monthly by
Fultondale Church of
Christ Meeting at
2005 Elkwood Drive,
Fultondale, AL 35068

Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.,
Editor

Address

POSTMASTER AND
READERS : Send all
correspondence and
forms to *The Reflector*,
3004 Brakefield Drive,
Fultondale, AL 35068

Services

Sundays:

Classes 9:45 a.m.
Worship 10:45 a.m.
Worship 6:00 p.m.

Wednesdays:

Class 10:00 a.m.
(Except when school is out)
Classes 7:30 p.m.

Meeting

David Hartselle
Dec. 1-6, 1991

USPS 606-140
Second Class Postage Paid
At Fultondale, AL 35068



By EDWARD O. BRAGWELL, SR.

LITTLE Amber Morrison, our great-niece, has a new heart. She was born with a defective heart, so a little over two months ago, when she was only six weeks old, a new one was found and transplanted into her chest. She, with her parents, will be staying at our house until she is well enough to be farther from UAB Medical Center. As we look at her alertness today, as compared to the hours before her transplant, we marvel and thank God for the progress of medical science.

As marvelous as Amber's new heart is, it is not nearly as great as the new heart that so many need and is possible from God. Ancient Israel had a defective heart that was at the root of all of her transgressions. God, through Ezekiel the prophet, pleads with her to "cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. For why should you die, O house of Israel?" (Ezek. 18:31) Later, He promised captive Israel to restore them to their land and give them a new heart: "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put

within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. (Ezek 36:26).

All who are in sin need a new heart. In the first three chapters of Romans, Paul tells why both Jews and Gentiles are lost and need the salvation offered by the gospel of Christ (1:16). The last half of chapter one describes the sinful condition of the Gentile world. The second chapter describes the sinfulness of the Jewish world. He concludes in chapter three that "there are none righteous" (v. 10) or that "all have sinned" (v. 23). He said the Gentiles had a "foolish heart" (1:21) and the Jews had an "impenitent heart" (2:5). So, both Jews and Gentile needed a new heart made possible by the gospel of Christ.

Peter tells how sinners can receive a pure heart: "Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever," (1 Pet. 1:22,23). One purifies his soul or heart by obeying the truth, by being born again.

Such a one hears the gospel of Christ and is cut to the heart (Acts 2:37). Having the heart opened by the gospel (Acts 16:14), one must obey the gospel from the heart (Rom. 6:17). The darkened foolish heart is enlighten by the preaching of the gospel. The impenitent heart is changed by the power of the gospel. The heart becomes penitent, leading one to be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). From baptism he is raised to walk in a newness of life. (Rom. 6:3,4). He is a new creature with a new purified heart, having been born again by the power of the word of God.

To all sinners we plead "get yourselves a new heart."

**Visit And Study
With Us Soon**

The Word Of God And "Homosexual Rights"

By DONALD TOWNSLEY

The Hebron Herald

WE hear a lot these days about "gay rights" or "homosexual rights". Let us see what God tells us in His Word about the "rights" of homosexuals.

Homosexuals Have A Right To Hear The Gospel

The gospel of Christ is to be preached to every creature under heaven (Mark 16:15-16). Some of the Corinthians had been homosexuals before they obeyed the gospel (1 Cor. 6:9-11). As Christians we must teach them the gospel and tell them of the love and mercy of God. We must teach them that all sins can be forgiven through obedience to the gospel (1 Tim. 1:15).

They Have A Right To Know That God Does Not Regard Homosexuality Or Lesbianism as an "Alternative Lifestyle"

God gave Adam a **wife** (a female, a woman-or womb-man) to be his companion, to be his lover with whom to have sexual union in honor (Prov. 5:19; Gen. 2:21-25; Heb. 13:4), and to procreate (Gen. 1:26-28). She was formed for the embryonic growth of babies and childbirth (Gen. 3:16). The "one flesh" relationship with her is "the natural use of the woman..." of which Paul is speaking in Romans 1:26-27. In marriage a man and a woman live in a relationship that is "honourable in all and the bed undefiled" (Heb. 13:4).

Paul says in Romans 1:26 that the relationship of "men with men" and "women with women" is "against nature". Homosexuals need to know that they dishonor their own bodies in these relationships of "men with men" and "women with women" (Romans 1:24).

They Have A Right To Know That This Kind Of Conduct Is Sin

Paul said, "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous,

nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God." (1 Cor. 6:9-10 *New King James Version*)

They Have A Right To Know That They Will Suffer In Their Own Bodies The Consequences Of This Sin

"That is why God has given them up to vile passions: their women have exchanged the natural function of sex for what is unnatural, and in the same way the males have abandoned the natural use of women and flamed out in lust for one another, men perpetrating shameless acts with their own sex and getting in their own persons the due recompense of their perversity." (Romans 1:26-27, *James Moffatt Translation*)

"For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due." (Romans 1:26-27, *New King James Version*)

They Have A Right To Know That God Calls Them "Dogs"

God said, "There shall be no whore of the daughters of Israel, nor a sodomite of the sons of Israel. Thou shalt not bring the hire of a whore, or the price of a dog (a sodomite-dt) into the house of the Lord thy God for any vow: for even both of these are abomination unto the Lord thy God." (Deut. 23:17-18)

"For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie." (Rev. 22:15)

They Have A Right To Know That Their Companions Have A Right From God To Put Them Away For This Sin

Jesus gave but one ground for divorce and remarriage, and that is fornication (Matt. 19:9). Jude tells in verse seven (7) that "Sodom and Go-

morrah, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire." In this text Jude tells us specifically the fornication they committed by the term "strange flesh." The illicit act of homosexuality is described (Gen. 19:4-5). "Homosexuality" is a specific of the generic term "fornication", just as "adultery" is a specific of the generic term "fornication. So, the companion of one who commits homosexuality has scriptural grounds for divorce and remarriage. Homosexuals have a right to know this.

They Have A Right To Repent Of Their Homosexuality

Paul said that God "now commandeth all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30), and this includes homosexuals.

They Have A Right To Know That Homosexuality Is NOT A Disease, But It Is A Sinful Way Of Life That Can Be Changed By Obedience To The Gospel

Paul describes homosexuality as a sin (not a "disease") in Romans 1:26-27. Paul also tells us in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 that some of the Corinthians had been homosexuals before they became Christians, but they no longer practiced this sin. Notice what he said in verse 11, "And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God."

They Have A Right To Know That They Were Not Born Homosexuals, And That Homosexuality Is Not To Be Accepted As Normal

Homosexuality is a sinful perversion of sexual gratification that one develops after birth. "Homosexual" means to be attracted to one of the same sex. Many times this perversion begins in childhood and continues into adulthood. God says such perversion is not normal, but it is "against nature" (Rom. 1:26), and it is a sin (1 Cor. 6:9-10). The homosexual needs to know that there is nothing normal about homosexuality.

These are the "rights" the homosexual have as revealed in the Word of God. God wants homosexuals to understand their rights and to turn from this soul-damning sin in obedience to the gospel before it is eternally too late.

The Gap Between The *Real* And The *Ideal*

By 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 there are and as they ought to be.

All responsible people sin, even Christians (Rom. 3:10,11,21; 1 John 1:8,10). Paul described his struggle with sin while under the law 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. But, there is a perfect standard for living in the world — the Holy Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:16,17). This standard is called "the perfect law of liberty" and we are expected to look into it, measuring and correcting our lives by it. (James 1:25). 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. (Heb. 5:12-6:1; 2 Pet. 3:17,18; Phil. 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." A good 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." (Phil. 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, in an effort 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 is often the case, 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 a drop-outs 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 Pet. 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." (Eph. 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 own faithfulness) so he through "lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit" (Eph. 4:3,4), preaches the word, reproving, rebuking and exhorting with all longsuffering and teaching (2 Tim. 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 long-suffering have their limits. We cannot become a partaker of other men's sins in the name of patience (1 Tim. 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*.

How an Indefensible Argument Can Eclipse a Defensible Position

By EDWARD O. BRAGWELL, SR.

SEVERAL of the papers published by brethren have recently devoted considerable space to the nature of Jesus while he was on earth. A great amount of it has been a reaction to the absurd argument that Jesus surrendered the "powers, privileges and prerogatives" of deity when he came to this earth. This is supposed to support the position that man does not "have to sin." If Jesus, being "just a man" while on earth, did not "have to" sin, neither do we — so the argument goes.

It is not our purpose here to deal with this argument, as such. The illogical, unscriptural, and detrimental character of such an advocacy (that Jesus was "just a man") has ably been pointed out by other writers in recent months — almost to the point of overkill, in my judgment. If you have not been reading these articles, I would suggest that you contact the various subscription papers published by brethren and ask about back copies that deal with this matter.

Our purpose is to point out that we need not let this indefensible argument eclipse a defensible position. As tragic as such an argument is, the tragedy is compounded by its all but eclipsing the original issue under discussion by brethren — the source and cleansing of our sins.

Those who contend that man sins only because he so chooses and not because he "has to" and/or that a Christian's sins are not forgiven even as he sins are now being portrayed as denying the deity of Christ. One writer put it this way: "I wrote to brother _____ and gave him the addresses he wanted. The *false doctrine* he speaks of was, sinless perfection, a *denial of the deity of the Lord* and a play on the words 'have to.'" (Italics mine, EOB). I have yet to meet the brother who teaches sinless perfection for any

man except Jesus, but this is a charge made by some against those who teach that the Bible does not teach that man must sin and that even unconfessed sins are cleansed by the blood of Christ.

So, besides its being an inexcusable argument (the argument that Jesus abdicated his deity and became "just a man"), these brethren have handed some a club to hit many who basically agreed with them on the original issue. What a tragedy.

We must not allow even a blatantly false argument used in defense of a position to blind us to the truth of the position itself.

The Bible still does not teach that we *must sin*. It does teach that we *do sin*. (Rom. 3:10,11,23; 1 John 1:8,10). The man-must-sin position shifts the responsibility for sin from man to God. It puts God in the terrible position of executing wrath against man because of the sins that he could not keep from committing in the first place — because of the way God made him.

The Bible teaches that the blood of Christ continuously cleanses a Christian of sin — *if*. If he walks in the light. If he confesses his sins. (1 John 1:7-9). Confessing one's sins is part of walking in the light.

The idea that a Christian is covered by the blood of Christ to the point where there are sins that God will not even charge against him is a perversion of the statement, "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." (Rom 4:8) The context of this passage, along with the Psalm (32) from which it is quoted, clearly show that sin that God will not impute is sin that is forgiven after it has been confessed. A careful reading of Psalms 32 makes this clear. The man to whom the Lord will not impute iniquity (sin) (v.2) is the man whom

the Lord has forgiven, he whose sin is covered (v. 1) After giving these general statements in verses one and two, the psalmist illustrates the principle by his own case. As long as he kept quiet about his sin, the hand of the Lord was heavy upon him night and day (vs. 3,4). But once he acknowledged (confessed) his transgressions (sins), he said "thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin" (v.5).

Now, one can "what about" almost any position to death, just like some have done the conditions for forgiven of alien sins. What about a person who is struck by lightning on his way to be baptized? What about the Christian who is killed in a car wreck before he can confess his sins? What about this or that difficult situation that would seem to prevent one from confessing a sin? Quite frankly, I do not have all the answers? As one preacher put it, that is "whittling at God's end of the stick." I must teach what the Bible says and leave such difficulties in God's hands. I believe it was Foy Wallace who used to say that "any clemency belongs to the judge, but I must teach what the law says." I believe he was right. I cannot allow all the difficulties that many might dream up to throw me off course and cause me to offer exceptions that God has not revealed.

I must continue to teach that alien sinners must obey the gospel plan of salvation to be saved. I must continue to teach that a child of God must confess his sins to be forgiven. I must continue to teach that we do not have to sin, but when we do sin, we have an Advocate with the Father through whom we can obtain forgiveness (1 John 2:1,2). If there are any exceptions to all of this that God wishes to cover by his mercy in the day of judgment (cf. 2 Tim. 1:18), then I will be happy for those so covered — but I must teach what the Bible says in order to save myself and those who hear me (1 Tim. 4:16).

No, one does not have to believe that Jesus was "just a man" while on earth, nor believe in sinless perfection for man on earth, to believe that the Bible teaches that man does sin, though he does not "have to" sin, and that Christians must confess their sins as a condition of forgiveness.