



THE Reflector

August 1991

Published by Fultondale Church Of Christ

Volume 31 • Number 8

Misplaced Faith

By Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

"...the genuineness of your faith, being more precious than gold that perishes,..." — 1 Peter 2:7

The Christian's faith is too precious to be either destroyed or misdirected. Without it, it is impossible to please God. (Heb. 11:6). We must keep it and try to pass it on to our children (2 Tim. 1:5). Satan, through his agents, works day and night to weaken and destroy it. He abuses various legitimate disciplines of thought — science, philosophy, education and even religion — to try to undermine our confidence in the word of God, the source of our faith.

Many institutions in society (educational, literary, broadcasting, theological, political, etc.), influenced by false philosophies, overtly and covertly attack our faith. This should challenge every saint, be he parent, teacher, preacher, elder or otherwise, to guard his faith and the faith of those under his influence. Only by diligent study and skillful use of the word of God can we counter these flagrant attacks upon our faith.

The immeasurable power of the testimony of God, unadorned by human wisdom or fleshly might, is sufficient to create and sustain genuine

faith. Paul, knowing this, determined to present the testimony of God in a way so that our faith "should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God." Notice 1 Corinthians 2:1-5:

"And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness and fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of

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**TEACHER
TRAINING
CLASSES
AUG. 19, 20
7:30 p.m.**

NEXT MEETING

**December 1-6
David Hartselle**

REGULAR SERVICES

Sundays:

Bibles Classes 9:45 A.M.

Worship 10:45 A.M.

Worship 6:00 P.M.

Wednesdays:

Bible Classes 7:30 P.M.

Misplaced Faith

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God."

He not only warns against corrupting the word itself, he cautions against presenting it in a way that would focus one's faith on the wisdom of this world, rather than on the intrinsic power of the gospel message. The testimony of God, of itself, even presented by "uneducated and untrained men" (Acts 4:13), is powerful enough to counter all adverse influences of the wise, mighty and noble of this world.

Paul, unlike some of the other apostles, was neither uneducated nor untrained. (cf. Acts 22:3). He possibly had the best education available to a Jewish lad of that day. When it came to fleshly credentials and attainments, he could hold his own with the best. Read what he wrote in Phil. 3:4-8:

"If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. But indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ."

However, the "excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus" meant more to him than all his fleshly credentials. His preaching and teaching were designed to draw attention to his knowledge of Christ rather than his fleshly wisdom, relationships and attainments. He encouraged others to do the same. He did not cater to those who desired wisdom, though he was capable of doing so had it been ap-

propriate (1 Cor. 1:22). He even concedes that "not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble," were called by his preaching. (1 Cor. 1:27). The bare testimony of God, without carnal enhancements, just did not appeal to their carnal minds. Yet, he showed no inclination to wrap it in carnal enticements in order to make it more appealing.

If Satan cannot keep us from speaking the testimony of God, he will undermine the effectiveness of the gospel in a more subtle way. He will cause us to promote the truth in a way as to produce a misdirected faith. Carnal incentives are dangled

If one will hear and accept Biblical truth on any subject from a Ph. D., a scientist, engineer, or an educator when he would not otherwise do so, his faith is misdirected. It stands in the wisdom of the men and not in the testimony and power of God. It stands in the carnal credentials of the messenger rather than the credibility of the message.

before the public to do just that. It is easy to convince ourselves that such means are justified because of the end we believe they will produce. We tell ourselves that we can not get their attention with just the gospel unadorned by fleshly incentives. So, we will draw them in by carnal means, then give them the testimony of God.

Churches use a variety of ways to appeal to carnal interests. Social and recreational activities are featured to impress and draw those who love organized parties and recreation. Well-known "Christian entertainers" are brought in to impress and draw fans of the entertainment world. Outstanding "Christian athletes" are featured to draw and impress sports fans. "Christian scientists" (not members of Christian Science denomination) are used to impress and draw the scientifically minded. They may even

feature a "Christian philosopher" to draw and impress those interested in philosophy. Speakers' high academic credentials are advertized to impress and draw the academically minded.

What is wrong with all of this? Is it wrong for the church to use a speaker or teacher who is also an entertainer, or an athlete, or a scientist, or educator? Should we avoid using one with a bachelor's, master's, or doctor's degree? No, on all counts, if he is a faithful Christian who speaks the "testimony of God". His message is neither weakened nor strengthened by his fleshly credentials per se. I have good friends who fit into some of the above categories who are outstanding teachers and preachers of the word. It is when such fleshly credentials are displayed before the public in a effort to enhance one's acceptability as a speaker of the gospel that causes us concern. This produces a subtle shift of emphasis away from faith in the divine revelation to faith in human wisdom.

We are seeing more and more brethren emphasizing the fact that their speakers and teachers are scientists, educators, engineers, politicians, criminologists, sociologists, physicians, psychologists, sports figures, and holders of various academic degrees. Is this not an effort to attract the carnally minded? If it is not then pray tell me why advertize the fleshly credentials of speakers and teachers? It seems not to be enough anymore for one to simply know

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*Visit and
Study With
us Soon*

'The Solid Foundation Of God Stands'

By Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

Good brethren can be a source of joy, encouragement, and wholesome pride. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians (2 Thess. 1:3-4): "We are bound to *thank God always for you*, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other, so that we ourselves *boast* of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure..." (All emphasis mine, EOB)

Brethren can also disappoint us. We must not let this discourage and/or embitter us to the detriment of our service to the Master. When conscientious Christians are engaged in an intense struggle to guard and sometimes to restore the moral and doctrinal purity of the church, it is awfully discouraging to have influential brethren say and do things that adversely affects this work — especially brethren whom we personally know, love and appreciate.

Maybe we learn that a preacher, elder, or other teacher, known and respected for years by us for his strong stand on moral issues has in fact been secretly practicing immorality for years. Or, a brother whose Biblical scholarship has benefitted us greatly proves to have a "blind spot" on some vital truth. Or, we see brethren, who ought to know better, openly compromising with digressive brethren — at the very time we are fighting tooth and toenail to curb the influence of the digression on those not yet grounded in the faith. Or we may work for weeks to convince people from the community to attend a gospel meeting to study *with us*. They accept our invitation but half of us have left town that week. Any or all of this is almost enough to make one want to throw in the

towel.

As we find ourselves in this position maybe Paul's message to the young preacher, Timothy, would do us good. (Read 2 Tim. 2:14-21). A summary of the message would be: "Don't let brethren's misbehavior throw you."

Paul knew how discouraging brethren could be at times. Some had criticized (judged) him when he least deserved it. (1 Cor. 4:3-5). Some had caused him a great amount of anxiety. (2 Cor. 7:5-8; 11:28). Some had loved him less when he loved them more. (2 Cor. 12:14-15). Some had shocked him by so quickly turning away from the truth to error. (Gal. 1:6). Some had forsaken him when he could have used their moral support the most. (2 Tim. 4:10,16).

Young Timothy was now learning how disappointing brethren can be. Two brethren, prominent enough for Paul to mention them by name, were spreading a cancerous message among the brethren. (vv. 17,18). Some were being taken in by their influence. (v. 18). Still others were in danger of being overthrown, so Paul urges Timothy "remind them of these things" to counter this error. (v.14).

Paul then reminds Timothy, beginning with verse 19, that, in spite of the disheartening demeanor of some of his brethren, certain basic facts were still true. As we struggle to do right and are discouraged by brethren's unrighteousness, let us also remember that "nevertheless..."

1. The foundation of God still stands solid. (v. 19). The faith of some may have been overthrown, "Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands." Brethren may have feet of clay, but the foundation of God is still a solid rock. The revelation of God, through the apostles

and prophets (Eph. 2:19-3:7), is still true. The gospel plan of salvation is still valid. The pattern for the worship, work and organization of the church remains unchanged. The purpose and mission of the church has not been overthrown. The verses that teach the pure and godly standard of living are still in the Book. The promises of God are still sure. It matters not how brethren may distort these things by their practice and pervert them by their teaching. They are still in the Book.

2. The seal of God is still unbroken. (vv. 19,20). The Lord still knows those who are His. (cf. John 10:27,28). He still stands by those who "depart from iniquity."

3. The house of God is still great. (v. 20). It is great *in spite* of the dishonorable vessels in it. (cf. 1 Cor. 3:11-14). One can find all the evils of society among our own brethren. All the rotten attitudes of society are among those claiming to be Christians. All the low down meanness of our society characterize some members of the church. There are brethren who will lie, cheat, steal, curse, fornicate, etc. on the par with any worldling. "Outsiders" do not have a monopoly on spiritual ignorance and religious prejudice.

Nevertheless, God's house is still great *because of* the honorable vessels in it — the "gold and silver." These, like healthy organs, receive little of our attention because they demand none. They go about daily doing what they are supposed to do. Often taken for granted, but seldom complaining. They just do their work and do it well. Like humming motors, they are seldom noticed unless one just stops and thinks about what is really keeping the vehicle moving ahead. Unless the motor develops a knock, we tend take it

Continued next page

for granted. Like precious metal, tried and proven by fire, these will be there when we need them. As we read the reams written and hear the multitude of words spoken about problems from within, let us not forget that for each one demanding attention by his misconduct there are hundreds, who may or may not be well known, who practice and teach the truth and uphold the hands of the faithful. Because of them, with their faith in God and His word, the house of God will remain great.

4. *The salvation of God is still personal.* (v. 21). "Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, *he* will be a vessel for honor..." "Be diligent to present *yourself* approved to God..." (v. 15) (Emphasis, in these verses, mine. EOB). Let me be concerned with my purity, even when other brethren are impure. Let me be concerned with my duty, even when the rest of the church is negligent. Let me be more concerned with my doing than with what we are doing or not doing.

Let me be concerned with my part of a work, realizing that I am not responsible for all parts. In the work of evangelism and edification, let me be busy planting and watering, leaving the increase to God. (1 Cor. 3:3). Let me sow the seed faithfully, even if some does not fall on good and honest hearts. Let this joint supply its part (Eph. 4:16), even if the other parts become disjointed. Let me realize that in the final analysis God judges me as a person, not us as a people. I can be saved even if my work (the recipients of my "planting and watering") is burned (1 Cor. 3:14,15). There were a few even in Sardis (a dead church) who had not defiled their garments. (Rev. 3:3,4).

Granted, there are a lot of things among brethren that are not right. There is much corrective work to be done. There is much to discourage

us, if we let it. But, we can be faithful — remembering that the Lord is faithful. When all forsook Paul, he said, "But the Lord stood with me..." (2 Tim. 4:17) His foundation is still solid, His seal still unbroken, His house still great and His salvation is still available to each of us — even if all others reject it and are lost.

Faith (Concluded)

and be able to speak the truth in love on the subject under study. This has little appeal to carnal minds in and out of the church. One must be academically or technically trained and degreed in some field that the audience can at least remotely (sometimes very remotely) relate to his subject.

A wiser and older preacher gave me some pretty good advise when I was a very young preacher still going to school. He told me to get all the higher education that I had sense enough to use. Then when I went out to preach to forget that I had it and try my best to keep the brethren from finding out. I still like that advice.

If one will hear and accept Biblical truth on any subject from a Ph. D., a scientist, engineer, or an educator when he would not otherwise do so, his faith is misdirected. It stands in the wisdom of the men and not in the testimony and power of God. It stands in the carnal credentials of the messenger rather than the credibility of the message. This is the very thing that Paul sought to avoid in his preaching. Why? "That no flesh should glory in His presence" (1 Cor. 1: 29) and "that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God" 1 Cor. (2:5).

The Reflector

(USPS 606-140)
is published monthly by the
Fultondale Church of Christ
2005 Ellwood Drive
Fultondale, AL 35068

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Second Class Postage Paid
at Fultondale, Alabama

POSTMASTER: Send address
changes to:

The Reflector
3004 Brookfield Drive
Fultondale, AL 35068

