

THE REFLECTOR

FULTONDALE CHURCH OF CHRIST

Volume 22 Number 1



JANUARY 1982

GOD'S GREATEST BLESSING TO MAN

Jim Woodell

There is no doubt that God has blessed man far more than he deserves and with all of the blessings of God it would seem difficult to categorize them and say that one is better than another. However, it is not a difficult task! God's greatest blessing to man is **FORGIVENESS OF SIN**. Sin is like a cancer that eats away at the soul of man. There is no human cure for this disease. It can only be cured by the God that created us. That He has made provision for sin is the greatest blessing indeed!!

Even the most casual observer of Christianity is aware that the very crux of it is that "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." When a person arrives in the state to receive everlasting life he has also at that point received forgiveness of sin. This was all made possible by God giving his Son to die for the world. What many people are not aware of is how God's greatest blessing is obtained.

Many interpret the above quoted passage to mean that all one need to do to be forgiven of sin is to believe (mentally accept) the divinity of Christ, but there is more to it than this. To believe as stated in this passage is to place explicit trust in and accept as Lord of our lives the Son of God. It means to obey as well. That "obey" and "believe" are used interchangeably can be seen by an examination of the last verse in John 3. "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God rests upon him." (John 3:35 R.S.V.)

When Jesus commissioned his disciples to go into all of the world preaching the good news of a savior he told them, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized

shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." (Mark 16:15-16) If a person believes in the divinity of Christ he will express this faith by obedience.

As the early disciples of Christ went into the world from the specified place, Jerusalem (Lk. 24:46-47), we have the first recorded sermon under this commission. As the people cried out from penitential hearts desiring forgiveness for the sin of crucifying the Son of God Peter told them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive a gift of the Holy Spirit." From this passage it can be seen that belief in Christ moves a person to obedience by being baptized in water. This procures for the salvation seeker the forgiveness of his sins and hope of eternal life with God in heaven.

Another example of a person receiving the greatest of all God's blessings can be found by reading the conversion accounts of the Apostle Paul. In reading the Acts 22 account you will notice that Ananias instructed Paul, "Arise and be baptized and wash away your sin . . ." (Acts 22:16)

If you would enjoy the forgiveness of your sins you also must submit to the will of God for all men. Remember, Jesus said "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved;" (Mk. 16:16). God will forgive you if you will let him. Obey Christ by being immersed in water (Rom. 6:3-5) in obedience to his will. This will put you into the body of Christ (Gal. 3:27) where eternal security is found. (1 Jno 5:11-12)

The sweetest path of life leads through the avenues of learning, and whoever can open up the way for another, ought, so far, to be esteemed a benefactor to mankind.

"That the Shame of Thy Nakedness Do Not Appear"

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To be naked is to be destitute of covering; without adequate clothing; barren or stripped. Nakedness presents a real problem to God's people in this age when society tends to grace the disgraceful, to honor the dishonorable, to see the obscene, and to chase the unchaste. The Bible warns about two kinds of nakedness.

Physical Nakedness

Since the fall of man in the garden of Eden, a sense of shame has been connected with physical nakedness. The Bible says of Adam and Eve before the fall, "And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed." When they ate the forbidden fruit, the tree of knowledge of good and evil, their eyes were opened, "and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons." Adam explained his attempt to hide from God by saying, "I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself" (Gen. 2:25; 3:7,10).

God placed approval on man's sense of shame by providing the guilt-conscious couple with adequate apparel. "Unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord God make coats of skins, and clothed them" (Gen. 3:21).

Strong drink often contributes to wantonness. In Gen. 9:20-23 it is reported that when Noah was drunk with wine, he was uncovered within his tent. Ham "saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brethren without." Ham "saw," not merely in the sense of an accidental glance, but in the sense of gazing with delight. He "told" his brothers, with what appears to have been delight and satisfaction. Ham felt no shame because his father was undressed. In contrast, Shem and Japheth "took a garment, and laid it upon both their shoulders, and went backward, and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces were backward, and they saw not their father's nakedness."

Decency demands that one properly clothe self and refrain from gazing upon others who have no shame and expose themselves. The individual who delights in staring at others who are nude or near-nude is just as immodest at heart as they are outwardly.

People who parade in nakedness or semi-nakedness disgrace themselves. When Aaron helped the Israelites to worship the golden calf at Mt. Sinai, he "made them naked unto their shame" (Ex. 32:25). Lewd acts are often associated with idolatry in the Bible.

Today, thousands of people have lost their sense of shame toward physical nakedness. Young women wear mini-skirts to the delight of young men who gaze at their exposed thighs. The tiny bikini is popular on the beach, and the beach attracts old and young alike (or is it the girls in the

bikinis that attract?). Hotpants and other brief attire are worn on the streets. Topless attire is advertised to lure customers to restaurants. Nudist camps are flourishing as "sun-bathing associations." Skinny-dipping sometimes occurs in ponds in public parks.

And to make bad matters worse, some people are irreverent enough to show their shamelessness by appearing in solemn religious gatherings dressed very immodestly. They dress for a church service as if it were to be a beauty contest or fashion show!

Spiritual Nakedness

Some readers who would heartily endorse what I have pointed out about the evils of physical nakedness need to think seriously about spiritual nudity.

Many people are destitute of spiritual garments; they are barren because they are stripped of righteousness. In Rev. 19:8 "fine linen" represents the righteousness of the saints. Peter tells us to be "clothed with humility" (1 Pet. 5:5). Paul tells us to "put on" compassion, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering, forbearance, forgiveness, and love (Col. 3:12-14). The saints at Rome were admonished to "put on" the armor of light (Rom. 13:12). Peter advised women to "adorn" themselves with the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is of great price (1 Pet. 3:1-5).

The church at Laodicea, spiritually speaking, was "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." That naked congregation was advised to obtain "white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear" (Rev. 3:18,19).

If we can understand how shameful physical nakedness is, we should be able to comprehend how disgraceful spiritual nakedness is. The soul destitute of the robes of salvation is unprotected from the storms of wrath and the exposure of its shame in the last day. To lay aside righteousness, humility, meekness, love, etc. is to expose one's soul to everlasting shame and contempt.

Numerous congregations are given to spiritual nudism. They strip off the doctrine of Christ, lay aside holiness, divest respect for apostolic authority, force the God-fearing from their membership, and make themselves barren of all that would be productive of honor to the Lord. Like Laodicea, they leave off zeal. They may meet in elaborate buildings and be rich in this world's goods, but the shame of their spiritual nakedness needs covering.

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**WHAT
IS**

TRUTH?



All about us the religionists of our time are offering us what they assert to be the truth. At the same time people are groping in darkness not knowing the answer. We are made to inquire with Pilate, "WHAT IS TRUTH?" Thus the need for a dependable answer as to what the TRUTH really is.

MEN'S ANSWER TO "WHAT IS TRUTH?"

According to Communists, the truth is what the party says it is. That which is said to be truth one day may not be considered to be truth at a later date. The truth changes according to their wishes. They create that which to them is truth. **A person could never know for sure what truth is since it varies from time to time.** **According to the Pragmatist**, anything a person thinks to be true is truth. His standard is the thinking of each individual and thus no common standard. **This makes each man a law unto himself.**

According to some religionists, the truth is what the church declares it to be. They are really saying that truth is dependent on the opinions of appointed men. This may be a pope, council, or supposedly inspired writers. The results is conflicting creeds, catechisms, prayer books and church manuals. All of these have changed and are subject to continual change. **According to this idea what was true in one generation is not necessarily true in another.**

God's written word is to be accepted rather than the word of man . . . "that ye might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against the other." (1 Corinthians 4:6).

GOD'S ANSWER TO "WHAT IS TRUTH?"

Jesus said, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth" (John 17:17). "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). "Everyone that is of the truth heareth my voice (John 18:37). "Howbeit, when he, the spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13).

The Bible says, "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:8).

TRUTH NEVER CONTRADICTS ITSELF

Many conflicting doctrines are heard today concerning such Bible subjects as "which church Christ established," "scriptural baptism," God's plan of salvation and others. Since God's word never contradicts itself, we conclude that when there is a conflicting teaching on these or any Bible subject, one or both must be in error! The Bible certainly does not teach both ideas. But the Bible itself is always true, being the "perfect law" of God (James 1:25).

CONCLUSION

A political party, the individual, or religionists can never manufacture truth. Truth cannot be fabricated by man. Man can only discover truths that already exist. Whether in the field of science or religion, truth can be originated only by Jehovah.

You are always welcome at the
CHURCHES OF CHRIST

Homosexuals Seeking Justification

Donald P. Ames



It seems a great deal of publicity has been given to those seeking to justify and excuse the practice of homosexuality in our society today. Newspapers and TV seem to almost go out of their way to give publicity to those who would like to ease the public conscience against such practices (a good example is the TV special "Homosexuals: Out of the Shadows"). As these people become more and more vocal, people gradually tend to ignore their actions (thus silencing the opposition they must face) or perhaps even come to feel sorry for this "oppressed minority" in society. Recent steps by these "gay" people even include the establishment of a church strictly for these people to attend (thus, "social acceptability").

Awhile back, a letter appeared in the *Newport Daily Independent*, Newport, Arkansas, seeking to justify this sinful practice, and my public reply (Letters to the Editor) drew some very favorable response from several different areas, so I thought I would pass it on to readers of *Truth Magazine*, in the hopes that others would likewise take up the pen and be ready to answer such efforts. My letter, addressed to the editor, follows:

Letters To The Editor

In the *Newport Daily Independent*, 2-15-75, was a letter defending Homosexuals as "human," only seeking "happiness," many church attenders, etc. It was argued such ought not to be against the law as "they're not hurting anyone," "sex" could be a very private thing," and "who are we what's normal in their sexual choice?"

Such efforts on the part of sexual perverts (which is what they are) to justify and excuse their perverted actions find no help here. The above logic could as easily justify prostitution, drugs, gambling or free love. Such people need help, and we should help them; but such help cannot be accomplished by endorsing and condoning what is wrong and perverted. That is like helping an alcoholic by giving him more alcohol!

Certainly God, who designed man and woman and established the relationship He desired in the Garden, has the right to say "what's normal in their sexual choice." We find He utterly destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah because of their homosexuality (Gen. 19, Jude 7), and termed it a "sin" (Gen. 13:13—NOTE: not *mental illness*, but a *perversion* of God's will—1 John 3:4). Under the Old Testament, such actions were "an abomination" (Lev. 18:22), worthy of death (Lev. 20:13). In Deut. 23:18 they were even called a "dog" (original word means "sodomite" or a homosexual). In the New

Testament, such acts are a perversion of God's will and a sin (Rom. 1:26-27), barring one from the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-10). They are contrary to God's law and to sound doctrine (1 Tim. 1:10).

Such actions thus are not only sinful and a perversion of God's plan (thus are not "normal"), but lead to a destruction of the very moral fiber of a nation. Let us not be lulled into a sense of appeasement and toleration by the efforts of some of these people living in sin to seek justification and approval of their unlawful and sinful practices.

FOOTNOTE

As such practices continue to seek more and more publicity, we must not hide our heads in the sand and hope they will go away. *Truth Magazine* has a very good tract on the subject of "Sexualism: A Work of the Flesh" by Weldon Warnock that brethren need to get and put to good use. Let us not be guilty of assuming that "everyone knows it is wrong," and thus let such practices gain a toe-hold. Both members and non-members need to be better informed on how to meet these sinful practices and seek to stop the inroads they have already gained.

THE REFLECTOR is published monthly by the church of Christ, meeting at 2005 Elkwood Dr., Fultondale, AL 35068. Our mailing address: 3004 Brakefield Dr. Fultondale, AL. 35068

EDWARD O. BRAGWELL, SR., Editor

SCHEDULE

Sunday:

BIBLE STUDY	9:45 A.M.
WORSHIP	10:45 A.M.
WORSHIP	6:30 P.M.

Wednesday:

BIBLE STUDY	10:00 A.M.
BIBLE STUDY	7:30 P.M.

Second Class Postage Paid at Fultondale, Alabama 35068.