

THE REFLECTOR

BULLETIN OF CHURCH OF CHRIST, FULTONDALE, ALABAMA

"A study of sexual attitudes of the 1.8 million member United Church of Christ disclosed that seven out of 10 believe the Bible is an 'inaccurate' guide for contemporary sexual conduct."

If you are more than a casual reader of the newspapers you might recognize the above as the first paragraph of an article which appeared in this past Thursday's "Tuscaloosa News".

Papers, Polls, And Permissiveness

So far as the results of this poll in terms of statistics, etc., we have no objection -- but the article reveals a sorry state of affairs existing within a sizeable segment of this country's religious community. Some of the facts gathered are especially disturbing:

- Roughly 50% deny that Homosexuality is sinful!
- 84% favor a woman's right to choose to have an abortion.
- Roughly 50% approve of premarital sex, at least in some circumstances.
- 50% favor decriminalization of prostitution.
- More than 50% would support laws protecting the rights of adults to sexually explicit films and publications.
- 40% would ordain an avowed homosexual to the ministry (another 13 % could not make up their minds).

Perhaps the most telling statistic of all is the one that has 73% of the "clergy" of this group holding that Biblical assumptions about sexuality have proved inaccurate! (59% of the "lay delegates" agree).

I've been preaching the gospel for 28 years, and a member of the Lord's church for 34, but it still gives me a slow burn to see such bald rejection of God's guiding hand. I can understand an atheist playing fast and loose with the Bible, making light of its principles, and scoffing at the wisdom of God...and my dominant reaction is one of pity for such men.

But, for those who claim the name of Christ, such is a conscienceless betrayal of the fundamental dividing line between what they claim to be and the rest of humanity. And, I never come across such presumption without being reminded of a bunch of children, each going about boasting how smart he is, etc.

It is laughable to observe these shallow, self-serving human minds matching wits with the unfathomable mind of an eternal God-- and seriously entertaining the idea that the come out on top! No matter that the Bible stands demonstrated as credible at every verifiable intersection with our present store of human knowledge.

No matter that its construction and writing style proclaim it the production of a single mind -- while viewed as a whole, obviously of a mind greater than man's. No matter that, in man instances, Biblical wisdom antedates human discovery by millenia. No matter that men have yet to come up with a more comprehensive or more workable system of morality than afforded in the gospel.

No, none of these things matter. The "oracles" have spoken -- God's word must kneel to the greater wisdom of such profound thought. And, of course, the "clergy" is the key. When men seek knowledge, the little they gain is frequently just enough to make them think they no longer need God's -- and the smug pleasure derived from accusing the Bible to be "inaccurate" is simply an extension of the destructive self-pride human wisdom often generates.

And, of course, these statistics show once again that people are largely what their leaders make out of them. The "clergyman" are way out in front, making shipwreck of their own faith, and then transmitting their own spirit of rebellion into the minds of those blind dupes who place confidence in men.

No, these members of the "United Church of Christ" are not alone in their religious philosophy -- which is why we are seeing such drastic sexual immorality as a more and more frequent aspect of American society. When the socially acceptable segment of our people, who also claim to respect the will of God, offer no higher morals than those indicated by this survey,

we have no trouble understanding the excesses to which the bulk of our people are willing to go.

Brethren, we Christians are not numerous, and usually not among the socially prominent, but we must be heard! Let us maintain the sexual codes so plainly provided for in the New Testament -- and do so openly, so that those we are able to influence can take heart from the depth of our conviction and the persistence of our plea.

The permissive line taken by these compromisers sounds good, and will appeal to the baser side of all of us -- but somehow I believe that most people are not ready to put their trust in such leaders for the long haul. Their value and support at the time when all accounts are settled will be worth less than nothing -- and to count them as allies then will not make that our brightest hour.

The mind that gave us the Bible was functioning with full effect for countless years before these modern day thinkers thought their first thought. Typically, we would find in their homes the same confused, disfunctioning young people we find elsewhere. There is no sense to allowing such mind to plot the course for the rest of us which has not worked, is not working, and offers no prospects of ever being a practical and enduring solution to the ills of the world -- sexual or otherwise.

--Aubrey C. Belue, Jr.

Tuscaloosa, AL 35401

Tear-jerking Polemics

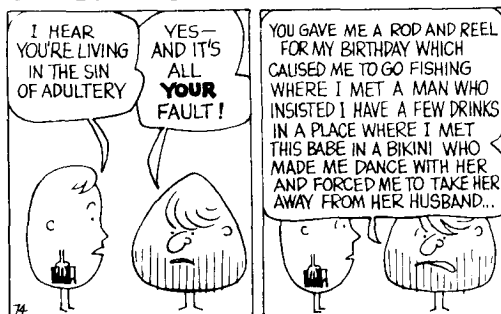
Sympathy for the unfortunate is strong among Christians. They are taught tender-heartedness (Eph. 4:32). Apologists of error take advantage of this. Tear-jerking stories often carry more weight with folks than careful reasoning from the Scriptures. It is easy for people to be swayed in their thinking by sympathy for those whom they think would be adversely affected if a proposition be true. It is nigh to impossible to get through such emotions to their reasoning power. It makes little difference how illogical, unreasonable, and/or unscriptural thier objections may be, they can see nothing but the poor victims of the application of the proposition. Proponents of error use the tool effectively.

The Bible teaches that "baptism doth also now save us.: (cf. 1 Pet. 3:21). We have presented many verses to sustain this proposition in public and private discussion. While we believe we won the argument, we have lost the hearts of some in the audiences to "tear-jerking" stories of a poor mother's son dying in a foxhole without the benefit of baptism. People are brought to tears out of sympathy for the "victim" of our proposition and truth suffers.

The Bible teaches that Christians, individually, are to care for orphans (Jas. 1:27) and that the church is to care for its own needy without turning the work over to a human institution. Yet, a word picture of orphans eating from garbage cans while the church "argues over how to do it" can melt the heart of stone. We have seen grown men cry at the thought. Such stories have rallied brethren to the support of church-supported orphan care organizations. (The fact that no Christian will let an orphan suffer is lost in the tears). Such puts brethren into no frame of mind to objectively consider the scripturalness or unscripturalness of church supported human institutions.

The Bible teaches that truth sometimes divides (Lk. 12:51,52). If a church divides one should look deeper into the matter for the root cause of the division. Was it needlessly divided over personal opinions and factious spirits? Or, was it divided because some were determined to stand for truth while others were equally determined to stand for error? Yet, if one can just picture the heart-ache and agony of a church-split somewhere and blame it on

THEOPHILUS



the application the opposing view -- then he has gone a long way in swaying an audience to reject out of hand his opponents view. Reason, logic, and scripture are thrown out the window -- one needs no more reason for rejection than a tear-jerking appeal. A once peaceful church's being rent asunder has powerful persuasion. Of course, such stories prove nothing as far as the truth or error of the proposition under consideration.

Over the years we have felt that battles for right on various issues that have troubled the church have all but been lost to the skill of tear-jerkers.

Now, another issue is surfacing where tear-jerking is a strong weapon. It is the marriage, divorce and re-marriage question. While this question has been around for some time, it that it kind of stayed in the background until quite recently. One can reason from the Bible until he is blue in the face about what repentance demands (that is, the ceasing of adulterous marriages) -- but he often loses the battle to a heart-rending story of some couple who became unscripturally married years ago and now love each other dearly. Must they now desolve this marriage? If you think this is not packed with emotion, then you have never had to deal with it! The defenders of the notion that one can repent and stay in such marriages know well the impact of the appeal of sympathy.

We have just received a copy of "THE BIBLE FORUM" (Vol. 1, No. 2) dealing with the marriage question. One half page has a tear-jerking letter from a lady in Texas telling of how she and her husband (parents of 3 gospel preachers) were mistreated (?) because of their marriage. She tells of the damage done the congregation by the preacher opposed to their situation. Almost two more pages is given to an emotional letter from a "heart sick child of God" telling of how great the church of 30 was doing until a preacher came there for a meeting (who opposes the "heart sick child's" marriage views) after which the church was torn up. How can one not feel for a small church (30 members) that has been torn up? After all they were at peace and busy converting the lost (if the report can be trusted) until this preacher dared show up! Now all of this proves (?) that the "must separate" view of unscriptural second (or 3rd, or 4th, or....) marriages must be wrong!

My brethren, issues change, but the sugar stick of error remains the same -- rely heavily on emotion and sympathy. We must learn that all the tear-jerking stories one can report (either true or imagined) will not change what

the Bible teaches. I know of no religious issue where such has not been used to sway views. Being aware of the danger of being carried into error by sympathy, let's be careful to rationally weigh evidence from the Scriptures. - Edward O. Bragwell

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GOSPEL MEETING: North Jasper Church of Christ, Edward O. Bragwell, Speaker. Sept. 25-Oct.1.

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CHURCH BABIES

More than twenty years ago Mr. Gaston Foote wrote an article for the Fort Worth Telegram under the above title. I hope I'm not going too far back into the dark ages, but I remember a song with the words, "Everybody loves a baby, that's why I'm in love with you."

Everybody does love a baby! Baby monkeys, baby alligators, baby bull dogs, human babies of all colors. With one exception -- most of us lost our fondness for baby adults quite early. When a person grows to maturity by the clock and calendar, yet retains the disposition of babyhood that is a real problem.

The apostle Paul had something to say about church babies: "I could not address you as spiritual men ... but as babies in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it." (I Cor. 3:1,2). It seems that church babies have been around quite a spell, at least long enough to grow up!

Church babies are always crying for attention. They must be the center of the stage. No supporting roles for them; they must be a star -- or else. If they missed the business meeting when a decision was reached, they grumble. "They did not consult me in the matter." If they were out of town when some event took place, they are hurt because it was not postponed to suit their convenience. They will push a dozen people out of the way to get to the preacher and say, "You must have known my little grandson has the mumps; why haven't you been to see him?" The preacher ought to just come out and tell the truth, no matter if he is a preacher, and say, "Haven't had 'em, don't want 'em, and I am not going." But he is more diplomatic.

Church babies need a special diet. A big chunk of sirloin steak would do them good, but they must stick with milk, with a dash or two of pabulum. If the preacher doesn't want to hurt the feelings of those tender skinned folks, he should water the Gospel down so as not to upset their digestive tract.

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Marginal Notes

We think a pretty good job is being done in restoring New Testament work, worship and organization in congregations. Of course, still a lot of work needs to be done in a lot of places. But, even in many of these congregations--we feel that there is another area that needs much attention. That being a genuine closeness among the members. There seems to be a tendency to go worship, then scatter until the next time without developing any close ties with the brethren. One cannot read the last part of Acts 2 without being impressed with the close feelings and association among early Christians. Honestly, when is the last time a brother or sister of the congregation has had a joyous event (say, a wedding) that they wanted to share with you--but you had rather not? How often have we let the death of a loved one of a fellow member pass by without trying to personally express concern? When is the last time you have had a brother or sister in your home? When is the last time that you have have wanted to "drop in" on a brother or sister? The last time a brother or sister visited with you, did you try to make them feel wanted, or did you leave them feeling that they were imposing on you? Of course, we all realize that circumstances beyond our control can prevent our doing these things -- but each of us needs to examine himself to see if he does not because he CANNOT or because he had RATHER not. Think about it.

You think you got problems? Wait 'til you hear mine! You've had an operation? What for? Oh, is that all! Heart transplants are no big deal any more, wait till you hear about my operation! You see, I had this in-grown toe nail.....

Don't we all tend to think that we have more and bigger problems than almost anyone? Of course, we have problems. Some are more serious than others. Many of them cause long hours of agony. We do not want to minimize this fact of life, nor make light of it. But, I wonder sometimes if we don't give so much attention to our troubles that we forget our blessings. Problems connected with living and our collective church problems can occupy so much of our attention that we forget the grand privilege that we have in being God's children with all the attendant

blessings. "For I reckon that the sufferings (problems) of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." (Rom. 8:18). - Editor.

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CHURCH BABIES (Cont'd)

If he mentions gambling, drinking or lying, he had better have reference to Florida or California. If he talks about stingy people, he should mention someone in Kalamazoo.

Church babies keep the preacher awake at night. A couple of quarreling church babies can do more to give the preacher insomnia than three cups of French coffee at dinner.

Once I heard a preacher say, "Next time I change places, I think I will preach a farewell sermon on 'Church Babies'". -- Bobby Key.

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