

The Reflector



Volume 30

Reflections

About The Reflector and otherwise

The Reflector now enters its 30th year of publication. The format, emphasis, and editorship may have changed several times since its beginning, but the basic purpose remains the same — to teach the truth of the gospel to any who will read it.

In its first decade of publication, it was ably edited by brethren Bill Lambert, Jack Frost and Edwin Hayes. They did their work well.

It has been the privilege of the present editor to engage in this labor of love beginning with the September, 1970 issue.

When we came to Fultondale, we had hoped that we could at least work with the brethren here as evangelist and edit this paper until our older 3 children, then in the 7th and 8th grades, could complete High School. They did. Our fourth child, then in the third grade, complete her school work. We were still here. Our fifth child, born since moving here, is almost through school. Our grandchildren are almost as old as their parents were when we moved here. These have been wonderful years for us. We are truly thankful to our God and the good brethren here for this.

So, for nearly 20 years, we have tried to teach the truth in love both as an evangelist and as editor of this paper. Our writings have not always measured up to the standards that we have set for ourselves. We have made mistakes. However, we, as always, will continue to strive to write material and run articles written by others that will be helpful to people trying to serve the Lord. Sometimes, the material has, of necessity, been controversial. We have tried to be fair, but outspoken concerning things we believe to be vital to the kingdom of God. As we begin Volume 30, we plan to keep doing this. We hope to keep

a balance between rebuking and exhorting — positive and negative material.

The issues that were on the front burner in the early years of this paper are still with us, but no longer receive the attention they once did. The lines between "liberal" and "conservative" brethren relative to those issues have pretty well been drawn for several years now and continue to widen. We need to continue to write and, like Peter, remind brethren of these things though they may already know them.

To have thought that the war was over when the heat of battle of those years began to die down would have been naive to the extreme. Old issues seldom completely die out, while new ones are constantly being introduced. We do not expect to see a time, this side of heaven, when the people of God will not be having to deal with some controversy. It has never been. From the early days of the church in the first century, when the Gnostics and Judaizers plunged the church into controversy, until now as one issue kind of wanes another is sitting by to take its place. There will always be a time for study and vigilance on the part of the faithful.

During the past decade we have seen a few influential men began to do and teach some strange things. Some of these men stood as giants in the battle waged in the 50's and 60's, men whose names were known in nearly every household among those who stood against the innovations that were then being thrust upon the church.

One editor openly lamented because a merger which he had tried to affect between the church where he then preached with a very liberal church nearby did not go through. A merger that would have supposedly

allowed them to work together without either side giving up anything.

Another prominent brother, along with some others, openly advocates the idea that God's marriage law does not apply to aliens. So, all marriages contracted before one becomes a Christian do not fall under the instructions of Matthew 19:9 and like passages. Thus, it matters not how many marriages one may have had before becoming a Christian, it is only after he becomes a Christian that additional marriages begin to count as adulterous marriages. So, one can become a Christian while living with his second (third, fourth, or any number, for that matter, on to infinity) wife without having to sever that relationship.

Another well-known brother has openly written that little children become guilty of sin. So, if God can mercifully forgive little children as they sin, without their repenting or confessing their sins, as the argument goes — why is it incredible to teach that God forgives Christians under certain circumstances even as they sin?

So, you see, as we begin Volume 30, there are still spiritual battles to be fought and much work to be done. We are saddened as new problems arise, but far from discouraged. We firmly believe that God can even use heresy to his advantage. Paul said, "For there must also be heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you." (1 Cor. 11:19). Such problems help separate the wheat from the chaff. They often force us to study as we have never studied before. They sometimes shock us out of our ease and indifference and force us to stand up and be counted for the Lord's sake. They sometimes force us to discard some erroneous reasoning that may have crept into our own thinking.

Just as we have been disappointed in some people and things, we have been greatly encouraged by others. We have seen some young men rise

up who are mature beyond their years. Some of them are doing some excellent preaching and writing. It has been our privilege to work closely with some of them in our "summer program" here.

While we plan to continue to deal with problems and matters of controversy as we feel there is need, we will continue to try to keep a balanced approach in *The Reflector*. There is much instruction and admonishing needed on matters that may be very

vital but not so controversial — at least, among brethren. No good farmer spends all his time and resources trying to kill weeds, he must spend much time planting, watering and nurturing his crops. Unless he finds a balanced approach, he is doomed to crop failure. It is not "either or" but a combination of both factors. So, while we plan to deal with what we see as the weeds (even the seeds before they become weeds) of error and strife as they arise, we also will

be dealing with many subjects with which few would disagree, but all would agree to be profitable to study and reflect upon. We solicit your prayers as we enter a new volume, a new year and new decade of work in these pages. If you know someone who might enjoy and/or profit from this paper, please let us put them on our mailing list. As one fellow said, "It costs nothing and worth every penny of it".
—By Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

Looking Back

As an old year closes and new one begins, it is kind of natural to look back over our past lives. A good review can help one put things into focus. The Hebrew writer reminds Christians of their "former days" (10:32) to spur them on to greater heights of faithfulness.

It is good for us, as Christians, to review our lives occasionally, not to live in the past, but to remind us of certain basic facts.

We Have Reason To Be Thankful.

We need to remember the days in which we were in darkness, without the marvelous light of the gospel. How thankful we should be that by the grace of God we were not left there, but have been "illuminated"! Without the gospel of Christ we would still be under the dominion of darkness rather than in the kingdom of the Son of His love.

"Giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins." (Col. 1:12-14).

Without the light of the gospel we would not enjoy fellowship with the Godhead and our dear brethren. (1 John 1:7).

As we take an honest look back at all the ways that we have been blessed, as we are sometimes prone to say, both temporally and spiritually — we can hardly help but be thankful. Most of us have been blessed, not only with the basic necessities of life, but with an abundance far above and

beyond what our forefathers would have dreamed possible. Most of us live in houses with "wall to wall" carpets. I can remember living in houses that did not even have wall to wall floors.

Most of us have such a hard(?) time getting to church. We must leave houses warmed and cooled to our tastes by thermostatic control. We, then, must ride to the services in a car under the same conditions. We, then, must walk several feet from our cars into a church building that is likewise heated and cooled. Think we haven't been blessed, materially? Compare this with the conditions under which many who have gone

Christ, would have been wasted — had they quit. They would quit nearer to their eternal salvation than they had ever been before. (10:37; cf. Rom. 13:11). We, like the Hebrews, would not only lose all that we had put into being a Christian up to now, we would lose the promise for which we started — heaven itself. (Heb. 10:34-39).

We Must Not Live In The Past.

While the past can be a good teacher and motivator, we must not let it become a burden to us. There is a need for "forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead" (Phil. 3:13). There is no need

to *brood* over past failures — correct them by repentance. (Rev. 2:5). There is no need to *gloat* over past successes. There is no room for boasting about these, because if we had done *all* that God commanded us, we would still be unprofitable servants, having only done what it was our duty to do. (Luke 17:10).

There is no way that we can rely on our past faithfulness to cover our present unfaithfulness:

"But when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and does according to all the abominations that the wicked man does, shall he live? All the righteousness which he has done shall not be remembered; because of the unfaithfulness of which he is guilty and the sin which he has committed, because of them he shall die." (Ezek. 18:24).

The past must be laid aside for the race set before us. (Phil. 3:13,14; Heb. 12:1).

My friend, the way to improve the past is to improve today. Today will be tomorrow's yesterday. The way to correct the past is to obey God today.
—By Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

"But, recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with suffering..."— Heb. 10:32

before us had to worship. It ought to make us constantly thank God that he has allowed us to live in such an age.

Then there are all those spiritual blessings that we have in Christ: Forgiveness, fellowship, the church, an assured hope, etc. Blessings that we did not have until we were saved by the grace of God.

We Must Not Quit Serving God Now.

This is the point of the Hebrew writer's (10:32-34) reminding his readers of their former days as new Christians. If they were to quit serving the Christ now, they would forfeit all they had put into the gospel up until that point. Every act of self-denial, every act of service and obedience, every act of sacrifice and suffering for

Looking Ahead

In a previous article we looked back. Now let us look ahead. Looking ahead seems almost natural. Some animals do it instinctively. The squirrel stores his food for winter. The geese fly south as winter approaches. It is good for people to look ahead, if we keep things into perspective. Paul was ready to go ahead and die for Christ's sake, if need be (Phil. 1:21,23), yet he was, at the same time, planning ahead, should the Lord allow him to live. (2:23,24). We would like to suggest three qualities of a Christian's view of the future.

A Far-sighted View

We should take a far-sighted view of the future. A life-time is not long enough for Christians to view things. We must plan for eternity because:

► *Life is so uncertain.* We have no guarantee of tomorrow. (James 4:13,14). James pictures the brevity of life by two striking analogies. He says that life is as a flower that soon fades (1:10,11) and as a "vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away." (4:14). The rich fool made great plans for living on earth, but made none for dying and living eternally. (Luke 12:16-21).

► *Jesus is coming again — unannounced.* He will come as a thief in the night. The universe will be burned up, melted by fervent heat. Those who have prepared for eternity will be saved. Those who have not will be cast into outer darkness, into the lake of fire. (2 Pet. 3:10-14; Matt. 25).

► *Eternity alone is secure.* Only that which we have planned and sent ahead, as treasures laid up in heaven, will endure. All that is laid up on this

Scheduled for 1990

Gospel Meetings

Granville Tyler

May 6-11

Donnie Rader

December 2-7

earth is subject to be destroyed by decay and depravity. (Matt. 6:19-20).

A Hopeful View

Faithful Christians have no reason for anxiety about the future. (Matt. 6:30-34). Some one has said, "We may not know what the future holds, but we do know Who holds the future." We should understand that death can do us no permanent harm. (2 Cor. 5:1-10). We should know that good will come to us both in life and in death. (Phil. 1:21).

Faithful Christians have every reason for hope. We should always be ready to give an answer (defense) for that hope. The Christian can hope because:

► *He has the forgiveness of sins.* His past sins have been washed away — removed by the blood of Christ (Rev. 1:5-7). He will not have to answer for them in the future. The future wrath that was due him for those sins is no longer a threat. He has continual access to the blood of Christ by which he can have forgiveness of any sins he further commits.

Cleansing by the blood of Christ is conditional. Those who have been washed from their past sins by His blood were washed *when* they were baptized for the remission of sins. (Acts 2:38, 22:16). Those who, after baptism, are being washed in the blood of Christ are being washed "if

they confess their sins". (1 John 1:9).

► *He has the promises of God.* It is impossible for God to lie. (Heb. 6:18-20). Jesus, as our fore-runner, having entered heaven, leaving us behind, has promised to come again to carry the faithful into that grand abode. (John 14:1-4).

► *He knows the end of his labor.* He knows that his efforts are not in vain in the Lord. (1 Cor. 15:58). He knows that he has a crown laid up for him at the end of the way. (2 Tim. 4:8).

A Submissive View

Christians are to approach the future by submitting to the will of God. One must make his plan contingent upon God's will. He will carry out his plans *if* it is God's will. (James 4:13-16). He should always want God's will to prevail rather than his own. (cf. Matt. 26:42; Luke 22:42)

Christians also plan to do certain things *because* it is God's will. (1 Pet. 4:1-3). They plan to let their past disobedience suffice the rest of their lives. They plan to spend the rest of their time doing the will of God. It is now their will for the future to do God's will.

Brother, how do you look ahead to next week, next year, or the next decade? With hope? With determination to do God's will?

—By Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

24 Years In The First Grade

Statistics show that if public schools met only as often as Sunday Bible classes at church, it would take 24 years to get through the first grade! Many people attend about half that time, thus a span of 48 years in the first grade would be spent.

Solomon says the trouble with knowledge is that it is limited. Yet, we live in a society based on knowledge, and hopefully the element of wisdom. The trouble is that we concentrate so heavily on intellect of secular things that little if any thought is given to Bible knowledge. Does it bother you who are fathers to know that your responsibility is in providing food, clothing, shelter and *spiritual*

nourishment? (1 Tim. 5:8). How long will it take you and/or your children to get through the first grade of Bible studies?

As parents we no doubt have planed to some way or another send those dear ones to college or some institution of higher learning. We will, no doubt spend thousands of dollars to see to it that they get that degree in whatever field will best prepare them for their careers here on earth. How much thought, time and money do we put in on spiritual education to prepare for their profession of being Christians? — By Gary Fiscus via Exton Exhorter.

Please Hear My Complaint

I worked many hours on the sermon. I read over the scriptural references several times. I referred to the commentaries and historical sources, and meditated upon the lessons I had learned at the feet of other gospel preachers who have gone before me. I prayed about it. I even referred to the maps of Bible lands to try to picture in my mind the setting in which the lesson took place. I prepared an outline and had it well organized.

I spent several hours trying to determine how I could best illustrate some of the major points of the lesson. I took special care to be sure that markers, an eraser, and any other tools I might need in presenting the sermon would be at hand.

Of course, most, if not all, the points in the lesson are points you have heard before, but surely we all recognize the need to be reminded of spiritual truths we have heard in days gone by, lest we let them slip. Perhaps this sermon was no more important than others; nor less important, for that matter. In fact, such preparation goes into virtually every lesson before it can be presented publicly.

Now everything was ready. The time had arrived. Because I knew I was prepared, it would be a pleasure to address the assembly.

But, alas, you were not there! Perhaps you were sick. If so, I sympathize with you and am truly sorry you have not been well. Perhaps you had some other reason that would be acceptable before God. If so, I would be the last to cast you in any kind of bad light. But if you *willfully* absented yourself, you haven't treated me fairly. When you take a notion to come, from time to time, you expect me to have prepared a lesson that will be instructive, informative, or in some way will spur you on to better obedience to the will of the Lord. And I admit, you have a *right* to expect all of this of me. But, may I suggest, that I have a *right* to expect you to be there to hear the lesson I prepare unless you have an acceptable excuse for missing?

Maybe this article sounds selfish on my part. I hope not. Really, I've grown to expect such treatment from many. In fact, when I decided to become a "full-time preacher" I knew there would be a certain amount of

this problem. My real concern is not so much with my own feelings in this matter, but with how the Lord must feel about it. After all, each time we proclaim His gospel, assembler around His table, etc., He is spiritually present. See Matt. 28:18-20; 1 Cor. 10:16; Matt. 18:20. When you willfully absent yourself from such assemblies, you hurt yourself by missing spiritual nourishment and by weakening your influence for good. You weaken the influence of the church as a whole, and cast doubt in the importance of studying and obeying God's word. You haven't really done right by those who have prepared themselves to help you gain instruction and encouragement from the Scriptures. But most of all, you have chosen to forsake the fellowship of Christ Jesus.

Christ will be here for evening services. Will you? — By Clarence R. Johnson in the *Exton Exhorter*.

YOU CAN'T PLEASE EVERYBODY!

I am reminded of an old Spanish parable about a man, a boy and a donkey. They were all three walking down a dusty road on a hot summer day. Someone passed and they overheard him say, "Look at those foolish people walking when they could be riding the donkey." Not wanting to appear foolish, the man and his son climbed on the donkey. They had ridden a short distance when another passerby exclaimed, "Look at that poor donkey carrying those two people. Aren't they heartless." At this point the son climbed down and walked beside the father and the donkey. Then, some said, "Look at that inconsiderate man making that poor little boy walk when he rides." Upon hearing this the father and the boy changed places. Still they had not satisfied their fellow man who said, "Look at that poor old man walking in the heat of the day."

So the son climbed down. They tied the feet of the donkey to a pole and proceeded to carry the donkey. Everyone then exclaimed, "Look at those foolish, foolish, people."

This only goes to show that you can't please everyone. Have you ever tried? Strive to please God and stop worrying about what others think! — Jimmy Tuten via *PAUSE - PONDER - PROFIT*.

Schedule of Services

Sundays:

Bible Classes 9:45 a.m.

Worship 10:45 a.m.

Worship 6:00 p.m.

Wednesdays:

Bible Class 10:00 a.m.

Bible Classes 7:30 p.m.

Fultondale Church of Christ

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