

The Reflector

"A Thief In The Night"

"But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up" (2 Pet 3:10).

The Birmingham News (Sunday, August 12, 1990) carried an interesting article entitled "Armageddon fever". It pointed out that during the previous week volunteers handed out 15,000 reprints of *America in Prophecy* by the late Ellen G. White. Apparently the current problems in the Middle-east have stirred up various adventists and date-setters to a fever pitch again in their predictions of the imminent return of Christ.

It looks like that after being burned by past failures at predictions these folks would wise up and finally accept what the Bible really teaches about the return of our Lord. He is going to return. (Acts 2:11). He will come as a thief in the night. (2 Pet. 3:10; 1 Thess. 5:2). A thief does not publish a time table when he is going to appear on the scene. Peter spoke of some who doubted that He would come, since he had not come. (2 Pet. 3). Peter assures them that Jesus would come, but he did not say when it would be, only that he would come as a thief in the night. Time is of no consequence to the Lord, since "one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day."

Jesus *could* return at any time. Christians have recognized this ever since the days of the early church. Many, over the years, have taken upon themselves to predict when he *would*

return. Some have given exact dates, while others have been content to only say that it is imminent. These have not only embarrassed themselves by their failed predictions, they have caused Christianity to be scorned by skeptics. No one knows when the Lord will return. Jesus said, "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My father only." (Matt. 24:36).

As the *News* article pointed out, past attempts at date-setting have all been proven wrong. William Miller, founder of the U.S. Adventist movement, predicted it would be between March 1843 and March 1844 and then updated it to Oct. 22, 1844. Charles Taze Russell, Founder of the Jehovah's Witness movement, predicted 1914. Jehovah's witness leaders made another stab at it by predicting it in 1975. Edgar Whisenant, a retired rocket scientist, tried Sept. 1, 1988 and updated it to Sept. 1, 1989. It is amazing that these folks still have followers in view of what the Bible says in Deut. 18:21,22: "And if you say in your heart, 'How shall we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?' when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not happen or come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him."

Some have learned the hazards of setting an exact date, so they just simply say that it is imminent. One local Adventist preacher was quoted in the article as saying that he teaches that the turn of the century is the likely time for the Second Coming. He said, "We can't nail down the year 2000 and say that's it. We've got to

give or take a few years either way."

I suspect that Oxford resident John Ronner, who was quoted in the *News* article, hit the nail on the head when he said, "Millennialism sells, and that's an indisputable fact. There is money in Armageddon." The sad thing about it all, is that there are many sincere followers who are helping these prognosticators sell their wares thinking they are doing the Lord's work.

We need to be prepared whenever the Lord comes. We can do this by believing the gospel of Christ, repenting of our sins, being baptized for the remission of sin and being faithful to the Lord. (Mark 16:15,16; Acts 2:38; Rev. 2:10).

Don't be taken in by these speculating book and pamphlet salesmen. They do not know anymore than you do about when the Lord is going to return. — By Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.



WHICH ONE OF THESE CHURCH LADIES IS OL' MRS. HYPOCRITE, MAMA?

A Shameless Society

“Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? No! They were not at all ashamed; nor did they know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; at the time I punish them, they shall be cast down,” says the LORD. (Jer. 6:15; also see 8:12).

The Lord’s rebuke of ancient Israel, especially the priests and prophets, ought to serve as a warning for our modern society. Israel had a two-fold problem: 1) they had committed abomination and 2) they were not ashamed of it. The Lord said they did not “know how to blush.”

It is bad enough to sin against the Lord, but to reach the point that one can openly do it without blushing compounds the guilt.

Have we not become a society that hardly knows how to blush? Things that were only done under the cover of darkness and behind the shield of privacy, in the very recent past, are now main street exhibitions — without any embarrassment. I can remember that even those who customarily practiced indecency, either in word or deed, were embarrassed when they slipped up and did it in the presence of those whom they thought were living by a higher standard. It seems that, as a society, we are becoming more and more shameless, not only in what we say and do, but also in the openness and boldness with which we do it.

Any society that loses its sense of shame and ability to blush is in deep trouble. It is well on its way to becoming a society that lives on the level of lower animals, satisfying every base appetite of the body and mind, without the restraints and direction of moral or spiritual consciousness.

The “sexual revolution” of recent years has brought a new openness in both language and conduct that ought to have us all blushing. Vulgarity and profanity are now common place. Things that should not be said at all

are heard nearly everywhere we go, without it even raising an eyebrow with most people. Public displays of sensuality have become so much a part of life that most people think nothing of it any more. We are exposed to it daily on radio and TV, at theaters, on tapes, in the marketplace, at school, at work, at social functions, etc. I am fearful that so much exposure has caused many of us to lose any sense of shame that we may have once had concerning such. This is frightening because of what Paul wrote about the pagan society of his day in Romans 1:26-32:

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. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them. (Emphasis mine, EOB)

One manifestation of how Christians are being more and more affected by the general lack of shame in society is the growing problem of immodesty in dress among us. Short shorts (sometimes rolled up a cuff), low cut dresses, see through garments, high slit skirts, skin tight clothing, and other sensually provocative attire are becoming all too common among those who profess to be New Testament Christians and the children for which they are responsible. It is not uncommon any more for young ladies to show up at the services of the

church wearing such attire — attire that is not only out of place in public worship, but should not be worn in mixed company anywhere. These have either never developed a sense of shame, with their parents’ help, or have lost it. Christians are to have a sense of shame that is deep rooted in the character, expressed by their clothing and general conduct: “In like manner, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with **shamefastness** and sobriety; not with braided hair, and gold or pearls or costly raiment” (1 Tim. 2:9 ASV).

Shamefastness is from *aidōs* “per-haps from 1 (as a negative particle) and 1492 (through the idea of down-cast eyes); bashfulness, i.e. (towards men), modesty or (towards God) awe: (*Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance*).

“a sense of shame, modesty,” is used regarding the demeanor of women in the church, 1 Tim. 2:9 (some mss. have it in Heb. 12:28 for *deos*, “awe”: here only in NT). ‘Shamefastness is that modesty which is ‘fast’ or rooted in the character... The change to ‘shamefacedness’ is more to be regretted because shamefacedness... has come rather to describe an awkward diffidence, such as we sometimes call sheepishness’ (Davies; *Bible English*, p. 12)” (*An Expository Dictionary Of Biblical Words*, W.E. Vine, p. 568).

Thayer says it is “a sense of *shame*, *modesty*... prominently objective in its reference, having regard to others; while *αἰσχ.* is subjective, making reference to one’s self and one’s actions... It is often said that ‘*αἰδ.* precedes and prevents the shameful acts...”

So, one’s dress should reflect a sense of shame that is deep rooted in the character — a sense of shame that “precedes and prevents the shameful act” of indecently publicly exposing the body by immodest dress. Immodest dress is but a symptom of a deeper problem, a character flaw — an inward lack of shame that should characterize Christians.

Another disturbing thing that I am seeing is the lack of shame of those who are sexually promiscuous. Young

unmarried people, even some who profess to be Christians or are children of Christians, publicly display their passions in a way that should be reserved only for married people and that in the privacy of their homes. It causes one to wonder what must go on when they away from the public eye. They are even heard to speak openly and frankly about their sensuality.

When a natural but undesirable consequence of their promiscuity evidences itself, there is still a disturbing lack of shame. When a sense of regret is shown, it is more in a vein of being sorry that they were so careless or stupid that they did not take adequate measures to avoid the consequences and not that they have done wrong and sinned against God. These will never be right with God until they are brought to repentance. This includes being genuinely ashamed of and sorry for what they have done to the God who created them. Well-meaning brethren, friends, and family members do them no favor by trying make them feel less ashamed *until they have repented*. If we really want to "confirm our love toward them", we will do all we can to make them feel as ashamed and guilty as possible until they show enough remorse to repent and get right with God. This can be done in a way that shows a love for their souls, rather than a self-righteous, more-holy-than-thou, spirit. *After* they have sorrowed unto repentance is the time to apply 2 Cor. 2:6-8: "This punishment which was inflicted by the majority is sufficient for such a man, so that, on the contrary, you ought rather to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow. Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him."

What are Christians, who must live in this kind of society, to do? Are we to be so overwhelmed by it that we conclude that we and our families cannot be expected to live right in such an environment? God forbid.

It is so easy for us to avoid our responsibilities as Christians and parents and blames our failure on the shameless society in which we have to live and rear a family. That is a cop-out, pure and simple. The societies in

which early Christians had to live was no more conducive to living godly and rearing faithful children than ours is today. If anything it was worse.

The Philippian Christians were told that they were expected to live "without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation" (Phil. 2:15). The saints at Ephesus had to live in a city where a fertility goddess, Diana, was worshipped. Other cities had their idols. Licentiousness, drunkenness and sexual immorality was generally an integral parts of idolatrous festivals and the pagan society in general. Could Christians be expected to live right and teach their children right under these conditions? Read what Paul wrote to the saints at Ephesus:

But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, **let it not even be named among you**, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. **Therefore do not be partakers with them.** (Emphasis mine, EOB)... And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord. (Eph. 5:3-7; 6:4)

Looks like they were expected to live above the society around them and to bring their children up right in spite of it, doesn't it?

Righteous Lot lived in Sodom, a city so ungodly that a sin was named after it, but he did not get so used to it that it did not bother him. Peter says that God "delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds)—then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment." (2 Pet. 2:7-9). Lot did not lose his sense of shame and decency. It still bothered him greatly to see and hear sin. God delivered him, so will he us if we don't surrender to the shameful conduct around us.

Remember what God said would happen to ancient Israel because of her shamelessness: "Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; at the time I punish them, they shall be cast down."—By Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

Biblical Wine: Blessing or Curse?

The Bible's treatment of wine can, on the surface, be very puzzling. Proverbs warns "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is a brawler and whosoever is led astray by them is not wise." (20:1). and "It is not for kings, O Lemuel, to drink wine, nor for princes to say, where is strong drink?" (31:4). So also Isaiah: "Woe unto them that are mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink" (Isaiah 5:22). In these verses "wine" and "strong drink" are strictly forbidden.

On the other hand, the same Solomon who warned men to stay away from wine in Proverbs 20:1 urges his readers in Ecclesiastes 9:7 to "eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart." Even more significant, Jesus miraculously provided wine to a wedding feast in Cana, and Paul urged Timothy to "use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities" (1 Timothy 5:23). So wine in the Bible is seen both as a blessing and a curse.

This apparent discord has precipitated many a dispute among Christians. What are we to make of it? The solution to this seeming contradiction has to lie in the differing meanings attached to the word "wine" in the Bible. That the normal meaning of "wine" in both Old and New Testaments is that of the fermented juice of the grape seems evident (Arndt & Gingrich, p. 564), but it is not without exception. The two words most translated wine in the Old Testament are also used to describe juice fresh pressed from the grape (Isaiah 16:10; 65:8).

It may well be that the positive biblical references to wine are speaking simply of the juice of the grape. But another important distinction needs to be observed as well. The Bible treats wine in two ways, as a drug or social drink (bad), as a food or table drink (good). Some have suggested that the only difference between the two is in the amount one drinks and not in the nature or the beverage. The extra biblical evidence does not point that way.

The wine used as a table drink in the ancient world was not pure wine, but was liberally diluted with water. It was a family food, not a social beverage. The wine was customarily stored in large pointed jugs called *amphorae*, and from these jugs was poured into large bowls called *kraters* where it was mixed with water (Greek for unmixed or pure is *akratos*). From there, it was poured into cups. The ratio of water to wine varied, perhaps with the strength of the wine. Homer

mentions a ratio of 20 to 1 (*Odyssey*). In the first century, Pliny refers to the mixture in the same district as 8 to 1 (*Natural History*). The fullest source of information is Athenaeus (A.D. 200) who in his *The Learned Banquet* quotes earlier writers who spoke of mixtures of 3 to 1, 4 to 1, 5 to 2, and called 3 to 2 "strong". Mnesthus of Athens observed: "Mix it half and half, and you get madness; unmixed, bodily collapse" Plutarch, early in the second century A.D., said: "We call a mixture 'wine,' although the larger of the components is water." In both the Greek and Roman world, to drink unmixed wine was considered intemperate (Will Durant, *Caesar and Christ*, p. 71).

The Talmud states that the wine of the four Passover cups was to be three parts water to one part wine (note also Maccabees 15:39). Justin Martyr (A.D. 150), speaking of the Lord's Supper, wrote, "bread is brought, and wine and water ..." (Apology I, 67, 5). Clement of Alexandria (late 2nd cent.) said, "It is best for the wine to be mixed with as much water as possible ... (*Instructor* II, ii. 23.3-24.1). Hippolytus (A.D. 215) and Cyprian (A.D. 250) speak of the same practice. (Most of above information from

"Wine as a Table Drink in the Ancient world." Everett Ferguson. *Restoration Quarterly*, 3rd Quarter, 1970. and "Wine-Drinking in New Testament Times." Robert H. Stein, *Christianity Today*, 6-20-75).

The ancient world knew nothing of distillation, of the modern alcoholic drinks that are 40-50% alcohol. Their wines were a maximum of 14% alcohol and Palestinian wines no more than 8%. Unless diluted with three or more parts of water, even pagans considered them strong drink to be avoided. The purpose of that dilution was to make the wine a harmless non-intoxicating table food. By these standards every modern alcoholic beverage from beer to whiskey is strong drink. Christians should avoid all of them. Surely the Bible's demand for sobriety must be more stringent than that of ancient paganism.

But what about carefully diluted wine as a table drink today? The problem for the Christian in America is that we have no tradition of wine as a table food. Since the beginning, alcohol has been used as a drug, a "feel good" beverage, and the use of the most innocent non-intoxicating wine would likely be perceived that way by others. We are living in a drugged society where God's child must walk circumspect, neither bringing an occasion of stumbling to others (Romans 14:2)) or shutting hearts against the gospel (1 Corinthians 9:19-23). Better it is by far that we avoid even the most diluted form of beverage alcohol so that our "good" may not be "evil spoken of" (Romans 14:16) and Christ may be exalted.—By Paul Earnhart, *Christianity Magazine*, May, 1990 via *Exton Exhorter*.

GOSPEL MEETING

Dec. 2-7

Donnie Rader

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.

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