

FROM MY FILES

By

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In the past 42 years of writing The Witness I have written hundreds of brief articles and notes which have never been developed into full blown articles. Some of these may be worth sharing with my readers, so the following are offered this month.

IF GOD IS GOOD

The goodness of God is seen in the way Jesus obeyed Him. Jesus is the world's recognized example of a good man. He was intrinsically and uniformly good, so good that no fault could be found in him. Would he obey that which was not good? Even to the extent of suffering? Even giving his cheek to insulting blows, his back to cruel and unjustified scourging? Even to being "obedient even unto death?"

What Jesus demonstrated is that God's will is good. In every circumstance, in all situations, however it may seem to the contrary, what God commands is good. The commandments are not mere stopgap measures to avoid something worse; they are good in themselves.

God's commandments seem oppressive to the natural man. He looks for a means to escape them, to get past them, to find a substitute for them, as if they are an evil that suppresses man and spoils his joy. But if God is good, then what He desires is good. The Psalmist wrote, "God is good and doeth good." Jesus said, "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me." "Not my will, but thine be done," because the Father's will is always good. Anyone who doesn't want to learn obedience to the Father doesn't really want to be a Christian.

SPIRITUAL GHETTOS ARE OBSTACLES TO UNITY

There are men who are kept occupied exclusively in the affairs of their own denominational group. They associate only with others of the same views read only their sectarian publications and attend only conventions and conference of their own group. They oppose any thing that does not square with their thinking and with the consensus of their "fellowship."

They are in a closed structure and cannot grow beyond it. Not only do they fail to grow beyond the spiritual pale of their religious ghetto, but also they fail to give any light to those outside that pale. This practice needs to be abandoned if there is ever any progress made toward unity among Christians.

INFORMATION WITHOUT RESPONSIBILITY

We are literally stuffed with information from radio, television, newspapers, the Internet, advertisements, newsletters, and magazines. We should be the best informed and the

wisest of all people with the highest morals and the greatest record of spiritual and cultural achievement. Instead we excel in confusion, depression and crime.

The reason is that in all of the information with which our minds are continually bombarded, there is an intentional exclusion of the basic truth: the reality of the Almighty and His purpose. It is like students studying arithmetic with the very best teachers and equipment, but denied the knowledge of the multiplication table.

Of course, there is still acknowledgment of God. Someone comes forth with the statistics that 62% of the people believe in God. But this is not commendable; rather, it makes the picture all the uglier. Better it were to never have known of God than to acknowledge Him and then go on ignoring Him and His purpose for His creation. Man has been so successful in rebelling, that he now boldly denies any responsibility to God. Such is the meaning of freedom in twenty-first century U.S.A. A prime example of this is the fact that whereas God forbids homosexual relations on the point of death, the only people who today are considered bigots and sinful are the very ones who stand with God against this evil.

WHERE'S THE DOOR?

When Martin Luther came to the realization that the church was suffering from false teaching and gross errors of the hierarchy, he simply made a list of ninety-five theses and nailed them to the church door. In the chaotic religious world of present day division and unbiblical teaching and traditions, there are many Luther's who view the situation as in great need of reform and restoration. But where shall one begin? Already each group has been splintered into many fragments by efforts to reform. The voices are so many that even the approach to unity turns out to be another act that divides and breeds confusion. Which group shall we reform? Obviously we must all return to the center of the faith, but this means that the appeal must be made to all. Assuming that one is ready with his ninety-five theses, the next question is: Where is the door?

UNENDING PUNISHMENT

Most churches have a doctrine of some kind of unending punishment for the lost, although it is seldom talked about. One newspaper article said: "These days even churches that believe in eternal punishment in a physical hell...play down the concept." While many preachers no longer talk about the lost being sentenced to unending fire, they do talk about an eternity of "spiritual separation from God." But consider some of the implications of this teaching. If the doctrine of unending punishing is true, (1) then every unbeliever is in danger of the most horrible future that can be imagined. (2) Therefore, every true believer in this doctrine must be compelled to make it his greatest priority to warn the lost of this horrible fate, and every church that holds the doctrine should make it the focus of sermons and every church publication. (3) One would expect to find the Bible to be filled with warnings of such a thing from Genesis to Revelation.

But we see nothing like the above. There is not one single verse in all of the Old Testament that even remotely suggests anything like endless punishment. There are repeated warnings of judgment for disobedience, but nothing about a place of endless

punishment. In the New Testament the punishment is described as death or destruction. It is the death that is unending, not the process of punishment.

At the very outset Adam and Eve were given fair warning in Genesis 2:17. God said, “Of every tree of the garden thou may freely eat, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil thou shall not eat of it: for in the day that thou eat thereof thou shall surely die” (Gen. 2:17). That was it, Death. But the traditional doctrine holds that God did not tell them the whole story, that death was not the real penalty, but that they were to be kept alive forever by Almighty God (there is no life without Him) and subjected to horrible suffering, suffering that would never cease – unending punishment.

Who can believe that Yahweh, God of perfect justice, would place man, His noblest creature, created in His own image, in a position with such infinite and horrible consequences, and give a warning that was totally misleading? To say, “Thou shall surely die” is far different from saying, “thou shall be subjected to the torments of endless punishing.”

“For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6:33). The Good News is that Jesus took that punishment of death for us when he died on the cross for our sins that we may have eternal life.

ORTHODOXY

Much of what is claimed as “orthodoxy” is actually the opinion of some leaders in the church of the fourth century who had the political clout, with the aid of the Emperor, to make their opinions “official.”

THE GAIN OF CONTENTMENT

It has been said of Jesus that he never worried, never hurried, and never doubted the outcome. It could be said of many of his disciples today that they are never at rest, never content, and never cease to worry over the future.

Greed breeds discontent. One who always desires to attain more can never be content. It is one of the weaknesses of our society that success is often measured by one’s possessions. We speak of a person being worth so many dollars, but Jesus said, “A man’s life consists not in the abundance of the things he possesses” (Luke 12:15).

“Godliness with contentment is great gain” (1 Tim. 6:6).

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