

Beauty

His eyes were fixed in a trance of love the moment she stepped into the jungle path. Her black face shone like ebony in the luxuriant light of the African moon. He was almost speechless in the presence of such enchanting beauty. At least, with trembling voice and a heart throbbing with emotion he leans forward and whispers: "You are beautiful, my darling. You have the biggest lips I have ever seen in my life."

But wait! The plot thickens. While this goggle eyed Ubangi is going bananas over saucer lips, his cousin in another part of the jungle is coming unglued over another African miss because she has an elongated neck. While the Chinese maiden is binding her feet to attract a man, this African girl is stretching her neck for the same reason.

While the European Fraulein is fixing her hair and buying clothes to attract a man, her counterpart in the distant desert is tattooing her naked body with indelible ink.

Since these women of the desert wear no clothes, their "beauty" is determined by the ornate and colorful designs that are stitched into their skin.

At the same time the American miss is strapping in bulges in some places and adding them in others, another young woman in the South Seas is having a front tooth knocked out. This bloody ordeal is considered a right of passage into womanhood and no self-respecting woman in that part of the world would think of having all her front teeth. The men would all think that she looked like a monkey.

Even more sad and sinister is the sickening practice of female circumcision practiced by women of the Pokot Tribe, and perhaps also by others. In their ignorance they take a sharp stone or arrow and cut off the external parts of a young woman's genitalia.

Alexander Campbell was a well known reformer in

a previous century. This was what he wrote about the subject:

“O Fashion, thou deity whom fops, empty fops and gaudy bells adore! Thou first-born of volatility, and full descended child of vanity; thou parent of ills, of woes unheard, untold, unsung; thou scourge of pride and lash of fools; O grim-visaged tyrant! Thou swayest thy oppressive scepter over souls incalculable; thou taxest thy oppressed subjects with burdens insupportable; thine iron fangs oppress the poor and crush the needy. Thou grand foe to liberty, unappeasable enemy to independence; thy despotic countenance thunders terrors through the souls of thy victims, and fills the minds of thy dupes with pride, envy, malice, and a thousand evil passions that distract and perplex their aching hearts. In thy domain and uncircumscribed territories are heard naught but sighs and groans, but frowns and curses echoing through thy hills and resounding through thy dales. O Fashion! Thou hast slain thy thousands and murdered thy tens of thousands. Thou hast led mankind away from itself, and ignisfactus-like deceived them. Thou hast taught the female, the tender, inexperienced female, who unhappily was born thy slave and nursed in thy empire, to borrow all her dignity, all her importance from the veering figure of thy countenance; to look for all her honor, all her consequence, all her happiness from thy extrinsic airs. In thy school, she learned to value herself from the patches and daubs of art, that in vain strive to add beauty to the master-piece of nature: As well mightest thou burnish the sun, paint the lily, or perfume the roses, as attempt to add beauty to the strokes of nature. O Fashion! Thou hast taught thy daughters to value a companion from the plumage of her garb, from the perfume of her locks, her well-set hair, her sparkling comb, her glittering ring, her rosy cheek that own the borrowed blushes of an artful dye; from the thousand gew-gaws and trifles that are the niggardly refinements of thy modern hue. Thy maxim is, value the casket, and despise the jewels it contains; admire the shadow and

neglect the substance; appreciate the glare and tinsel, and depreciate the pearls of great value; adorn the outside, leave the mind a barren wild, uncultivated desert, where weeds poisonous luxuriantly grow. These, O inexorable Fashion, are but the species of ills that complete thy train and compose thy retinue."

Solomon wrote: **"As a jewel of gold in a swine's snout, so is a fair woman without discretion."** (Prov. 11:22.) Peter admonishes women to concentrate on the **"hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price."** (1 Pet. 3:4.)

Certainly the Christian woman is not to be distinguished by a mad scramble for physical beauty. There is in Scripture a concept of beauty that does not change with age or culture. It does not need to be altered by every generation or refined by the latest fad. It does not wither with age or "friz out" between appointments. It is to this kind of beauty that God invites His children to pursue with diligence and treasure as gold.

"Favor is deceitful and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised" (Prov. 31:30.)

The Mathematics of Evangelism

Tom Tucker once observed that the early church grew by addition and multiplication, while today's church often "grows" by subtraction and division.

Note these Scriptures:

- **"And there were ADDED unto them in that day about 3,000 souls" (Acts 2:41.)**
- **"And the Lord ADDED to the church daily" (Acts 2:47.)**
- **"And believers were the more ADDED to the Lord" (Acts 5:14.)**
- **"The number of disciples was MULTIPLIED" (Acts 6:1.)**
- **"And the number of disciples MULTIPLIED in Jerusalem greatly" (Acts 6:7.)**
- **"Then had the church rest . . . and were MULTIPLIED" (Acts 9:31.)**
- **"But the Word of the Lord grew and MULTIPLIED" (Acts 12:24.)**

It is important to note that the word "subtraction" is not found in the Bible, and that "divisions" are condemned as a work of the flesh.

There is something intrinsically beautiful about churches growing because they have so many "additions." **"Behold how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity" (Ps. 133:1.)**

When the disciples are "multiplied" we enter into a new dimension of growth. It was when the disciples were multiplied that the early church experienced it's first misunderstanding between brethren.. **"And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration" (Acts 6:1.)** Rapid grow invariably

brings tension. Fortunately, the Holy Spirit enables us to forbear one another in love and helps us to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Paul wrote to the Galatians that they should walk in the Spirit. The Holy Spirit would prevent them from biting and devouring one another, for the "fruit of the Spirit is love."

The works of the flesh, he continued, are manifest. Hatred turns to strife, and then jealousy. Jealousy turns to anger and factions. Factions then become formal and result in divisions. Divisions are not formed by addition and multiplication. They are formed when the works of the flesh become manifest. Divisions are formed by subtractions. **ONE CANNOT BE INVOLVED IN A HERESY WITHOUT BEING SEPARATED FROM CHRIST!**

Every living body must have a means of excreting poison. Heresy is that which removes poison from the Body of Christ. The approved cling to Jesus, and the heretics cling to someone, or something else. **"For there must also of necessity by heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you" (I Cor. 11:19.)**

The wicked one is described by God as "more subtle than any beast of the field." He approaches us so softly, and bandages our eyes so skillfully, that every way of a man seems right in his own eyes. Jesus once warned His disciples that those who put them to death would think they were doing God service (John 16:2.)

Many modern churches do not literally crucify others as they did in days gone by, but with the same diabolical motivation they argue and debate themselves into subtractions and division. Since the division is their own creation, they step back and admire it. Hymenaeus and Philetus were men like this. Their words, however, ate like gangrene in the Body of Christ (II Tim. 2:17.) Diotrephes was another who refused to receive the brethren and cast out of the church those who did (III John 9-11.)

We may not be able to solve all of the problems about which sincere brethren disagree, but we can at least

point out, that when brethren divide, it just doesn't add up.

Milk . . . eggs . . . and work

Lee Passwater's mother passed on this little proverb to her children. "Anybody who wants to live on this farm has got to give milk, lay eggs, or work." At first, it seems like everybody really had a choice. In reality they didn't. The only option for the children was to get busy and go to work.

That was, of course, a different generation. In those days every child was an economic asset to the family. I am told that at the turn of the century, every child represented the monetary equivalent of \$5,000 to its parents. Each child had a job to do. They would milk the cows, gather the eggs, work in the garden, harvest the crops, cook in the kitchen, and do a thousand other meaningful tasks. The work they did was not only significant, it was essential. The children actually enabled the family to survive.

Today, I am told, that the average American child represents more than a \$60,000 liability to its parents. We may WANT our children, but we do not NEED them! Economically, we would be better off without them.

Our children may be lazy, but they are not stupid. They quickly catch on that the family will survive whether they clean their room or not. The incentive to work is not as strong as it once was. The absence of meaningful work and genuine significance has helped to make suicide one of the leading causes of death among teenagers.

The church has not always understood, or helped in dealing with this problem. We have sought to lure these kids into the Kingdom with various forms of entertainment. The church with the biggest pizza party, or best ski trip, seems to have the biggest youth group. Thus we have put the peddle to the metal in an effort to outdo the church down the street. If "our concert" is better than "your concert," then the kids will hang out here instead of there.

The Scriptures do not mention rewards for "hanging

out." The Lord seems to emphasize the importance of productivity. The man with five talents worked and gained five talents more. The man with two talents worked and gained two talents more. The man with one talent did not work at all, and consequently was condemned. The branch that did not bear fruit was not covered with sparkle dust and used to decorate the mantel, it was cast into the fire.

The Lord of the vineyard is not happy when His trees do not bear fruit. He may be willing to dig around a tree and put in fertilizer. At some point, however, the tree that does not bear fruit will be cut down and cast into the fire.

The secret to doing the work of God, however, is not our strength, but his. We bear fruit when we "abide in Him." When His power abides in us we are able to accomplish exceeding, abundantly above all that we can ask or imagine.

What do you want to do for Jesus? Give milk? Lay eggs? Or work?

Death . . . and New Life

It is not at all uncommon to hear the First Century described as a time when the “church was pure.” Many dream of experiencing that “purity and power” in our own generation. We look with embarrassment on churches that die, institutions that go sour, and movements that crystalize. “If only we could restore the First Century Church,” they say, “then the church would be a perennial source of power and strength.”

Such thinking, however, does not stand up under scrutiny. Everyone ought to know that the early church had plenty of problems. The Jerusalem Church had a problem with integration. The Thessalonian Church had a problem with laziness. The Corinthian Church had more problems than most churches in our own generation. They had problems with division, immorality, court battles, marriage, idolatry, the Lord’s Supper, Spiritual gifts, the work of women, and even the resurrection. The Churches of Galatia, of all things, had trouble with a perverted gospel, etc. The churches of the First Century were not as “pure” as many people naively believe they were.

Even more shocking, however, is the obvious fact that all of these churches died. The famous churches we read about on the pages of the Bible disappeared. Where are these churches now? In Bible times they were young and healthy. In spite of their problems they did impact their world for Christ. While Paul was at Ephesus, for example, everyone in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks (Acts 19:10.) These young healthy churches, however, began to grow old. Ultimately they went through periods of aging and stagnation, and then finally died!

Please! Let it be emphatically understood that Christianity did not die! Jesus promised that nothing would ever destroy His church, not even the “gates of hell.” The combined powers of demons and dictators will never

be sufficient to prevail against the church of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Yet, it is equally clear, that Christianity died out in Jerusalem. This, as you know, is where the church began. We cannot fault the way this church came into existence, for it was founded by inspired men under the direct influence of the Holy Spirit. But the Jerusalem church did die! The thousands of believers who were added to the Lord there also died, or were dispersed by persecution.

There is still a sense, however, in which Jerusalem is the "Mother of us all" (Gal. 4:26.) Like a beautiful tree she spread her branches and planted seeds all over the world before she died. There is a sense, therefore, in which the church in Jerusalem lives on in the lives of her children.

That which happened in Jerusalem, happened also in every other church of the First Century, with one notable exception, the church at Rome.

The Church at Rome once had a faith that was proclaimed through the whole world (Rom. 1:8.) They triumphed over Imperial persecution to become leaders of other churches in other places. Their influence came to shape and dominate the doctrines and dogmas of others.

At some point in time, however, it seems obvious that the church in Rome died. Halley's Bible Handbook (p. 872) describes one part of Roman Church history as the "Pornocracy," or "Rule of Harlots." Pope Sergius III, for example, had a mistress who filled the papal chair with paramours and bastard sons. Jesus had been dethroned in the Roman Church and the papal palace became a den of robbers. Pope John XII was said to have been "guilty of almost every crime; violated virgins and widows, high and low; lived with his father's mistress, made the papal palace a brothel; was killed while in the act of adultery by the woman's enraged husband." The "church" had died, but the corpse was not buried. The living organism established by Christ had become an institution, embalmed with political power but still putrid. Instead of blessing the world with

fresh flowers of grace and truth, it became a jewel encrusted sarcophagus filled with dead men's bones and all uncleanness.

THE TRAGEDY OF AN UNBURIED CORPSE

Eva Peron was once young and heathy. She was, as you recall, a political firebrand who was much loved by her people. She got sick with cancer and died at 8:25 p.m., July 26, 1952. She was loved so much, however, that her followers did not want her buried.

Dr. Pedro Ara, the distinguished Spanish Pathologist, was hired to embalm her in such a way that she would remain immortal. The elaborate embalming procedure took several months. When her corpse was finally put on display, so many people clamored to see her that sixteen were crushed to death and four thousand others had to be treated for injuries.

Her "presence" created such political turmoil that the head of the Argentine Intelligence Service confiscated the body with the intention of giving it a decent burial. While waiting for instructions the body was placed in the custody of Major Antonio Arandia, who hid it in his apartment. One morning before dawn he was awakened by a strange noise. He saw a shadowy figure in the doorway and assumed it was the Peronistas coming for their beloved. He grabbed his pistol and shot, only to discover that he had just killed his pregnant wife who had gotten up to use the restroom.

At this point the corpse was turned over to Col. Hector Cabanillas of the Secret Police. He decided to send her abroad until passions cooled. In September 1955, Eva's body was sent to the Argentine Embassy in Bonn, Germany. It was in a packing case marked "Radio Sets." Unknown to the Ambassador, it was kept in a storeroom until it could be placed in a coffin and sent to Rome.

In Rome the famous corpse was received by Giuseppina Airoldi, a lay sister of the Society of St. Paul.

She was told that the body was that of an Italian widow named Maggi who had died in Argentina. The remains were taken to a cemetery in Milan where they were to remain buried for sixteen years..

Meanwhile, back in Argentina, terrorists continued to kill in her name. Bombs exploded like firecrackers on the anniversary of her death. Signs appeared everywhere screaming, "Where is Eva Peron's Body?" "Give Back the Body of our Beloved Señora!" Former President Pedro Aramburu was kidnaped and murdered in a vain attempt to make him tell where the beloved body was hidden.

When the word was out that the terrorists were coming to Italy, the body was exhumed on September 2, 1971. The Argentine Government received the cooperation of the Italian, French, and Spanish Governments, and the body crossed national borders without being discovered.

After spending the night in a Perpignan garage, the body was driven to Spain, and then escorted by two car loads of Spanish police for the final 450 mile lap to Madrid.

Several notable witnesses were present when the lid of the casket was finally opened, There was Juan Peron himself, his new wife Isabel, and the embalmer, Dr. Ara. "Her" hair was wet and dirty. The stainless steel hairpins were so rusty they crumbled in your fingers. One fingertip was broken off, and one ear was slightly bent. There were a few minor cracks in her plastic coating, but otherwise she was the same as when first buried in 1955.

The famous corpse remained in Madrid until the Perons came back to power, and Juan himself had passed away. Isabel, then President of the country, sent a chartered jet to retrieve the body. Eva's body was escorted by Isabel's Social Welfare Minister, and a mystic who claimed to be in daily communication with the angel Gabriel.

They were met at the airport by a dozen bodyguards carrying machine guns. The body was rushed to lie in state in the crypt of the Presidential Chapel by the body of Juan himself, who had just died.

While this story is incredibly pitiful and sick, it is also quite instructive. When Eva died she lost control of her own body. Without her permission it became a tool of others to do with as they pleased.

JESUS DID NOT RUN FROM DEATH

Jesus did not run from death, nor did he allow his earthly remains to become a tool of Satan. He said: **“Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit” (John 12:24.)** Jesus was perfectly content to die, and for His earthly body to disappear. In fact, He said it was “expedient” or “necessary” for Him to go away. His departure would make it possible for the Holy Spirit to come and do His marvelous works.

Satan delights in anything that detracts from the Sovereignty of God. Remember, he disputed with Michael the Archangel about the body of Moses (Jude 9.) Apparently the Devil wanted control. He wanted to get his hands on that body and use it as a tool to do his own wicked work. A plastic coated grain of wheat has no power. It can be displayed, used or abused, by whoever has possession of it. Until it is planted in the earth, however, it abides alone! It is only when that grain of wheat is given over to God that it manifests the power of new life. When the seed is planted, it loses its own identity. It seems to be destroyed by the corrosive elements of earth. It seems to disappear. When it dies, however, by the power of God it produces much fruit.

Jesus did not run from death for He knew in advance the power of His resurrection! Remember, it was Jesus who created all things. Nothing came into being that He did not create (John 1:3.) On the third day of creation He made living things and ordained that they reproduce after their kind (Gen. 1:11-12.) Every living thing would produce “seeds” for the perpetuation of it’s existence. When seeds do not fall to the ground and die, they abide

alone. If all seeds refused to die, the life they represent would be doomed to extinction. For this reason no man had to take the life of Jesus, He gave it (John 10:18.)

The germ of life within a seed is invisible until it is planted. The most powerful microscope cannot discern that spark of life hidden within a seed. Nor can that life be manifest, or transferred, without the death of the seed itself. This truth speaks to the very essence of Christianity. If any man wants to follow Jesus, He must take up a cross and die.

THE EXAMPLE OF PAUL

The Apostle Paul had a great deal to say about his own death and the power of God. Please prayerfully consider these following verses:

- **“For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:19-20.)**
- **“But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world” (Gal. 6:14.)**
- **“Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die: And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain: But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body.” (1 Cor 15:36-38)**
- **“I die daily” (1 Cor. 15:51.)**
- **“For me to live in Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:21.)**
- **“But what things were gain to me, those I**

counted loss for Christ" (Phil. 3:7.)

- **"Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: (Rom 6:3-8)**

These, and other Scriptures, indicate that Paul considered himself to be dead, and that this death to himself, was the key to experiencing the power of the resurrection.

A REMARKABLE EXAMPLE

Crosses by both intent and design are not convenient. Neither are they just to sing about, they are to die upon. Those who "die" that Christ might live, give eloquent testimony which is worthy of our consideration.

Consider, for example, the story of a denomination that deliberately died. They formalized the death of their own religious organization by writing THE LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT OF THE SPRINGFIELD PRESBYTERY. It was dated June 28, 1804.

Here are a few excerpts from this remarkable document:

"The Presbytery of Springfield, sitting at Caneridge, in the county of Bourbon, being through the gracious

Providence, in more than ordinary bodily health, growing in strength and size daily; and in perfect soundness and composure of mind; but knowing that it is appointed for all delegated bodies once to die; and considering that the life of every such body is very uncertain, do make and ordain this our last will and testament, in manner and form following, viz:

- *Imprimis - We will that this body die, be dissolved, and sink into union with the body of Christ at large; for there is but one body and one spirit, even as we are called in one hope of our calling.*
- *Item - that our name of distinction, with its reverend title, be forgotten, that there be but one Lord over God's heritage, and his name one.*
- *Item - We will, that our power of making laws for the government of the Church, and executing them by delegating authority, forever cease; that the people may have free course to the Bible, and adopt the law of the spirit of life in Jesus Christ. . .*
- *Item - We will, that the people henceforth take the Bible as the only sure guide to heaven; and as many as are offended with other books, which stand in competition with it may cast them into the fire if they choose; for it is better to enter into the life having one book than having many to be cast into hell.*
- *Item - We will that preachers and people cultivate a spirit of mutual forbearance; pray more and dispute less; and while they behold the signs of the times, look up, and confidently expect that redemption draweth nigh . . ."*

These few quotes provide insight into the minds and hearts of these godly pioneers. They acted with great courage. One major reason for the demise of their denomination was their burning desire to promote unity in

the Body of Christ. Their historical roots reached back to the great Cane Ridge Revival of 1801. The wonderful unity of that revival experience was already being tarnished by disputes and disagreements. Several new denominations had already been formed. Someone said that the revivals often go from **man**, to **movement**, to **machine**, to **monument**. The courageous decision of the Springfield Presbytery enabled them to avoid becoming a heartless machine, or a lifeless monument.

LET US NOT RUN FROM DEATH

Both of my grandfathers have been dead for years. They lived in a world of horse-drawn vehicles, and homes that were lighted by candles and kerosene lamps. They served their generation and fell asleep. They would find it difficult, if not impossible, to relate to or understand the complex problems of our own generation.

Reason compels me to acknowledge that I too will serve my generation and fall asleep. I am already feeling a bit uncomfortable in the digital computerized world around me. The next generation will be served far better by my children than by me. Yet, my children will probably never reach their full potential while I am alive. I still find it difficult not to frown over their shoulders when they do something differently than I would do it.

There is, of course, a sense in which my life, and my faith, will continue in the lives of my descendants. At the same time, there is also a very real sense in which I will need to die. Not only will my body be worn out, but my ability to adapt and serve will also wither like a winter leaf.

The time has come for us to cease running from death. Death has no sting for those who believe in Jesus Christ. Death is not the end of life for us, it is the beginning. Through death, Jesus destroyed that one who has the power of death, that is the Devil. And He has delivered us who through fear of death were all of our life

times subject to bondage. The grain of wheat that does not die abides alone! When it falls into the ground and dies, it brings forth much fruit.

That which is true of an individual, is also true of congregations and denominations. Churches also grow old and die. They also lose their ability to adapt and be relevant. Such churches should be honored and not ridiculed. We should offer to them the same appreciation and respect which we give to our parents sitting in a rocking chair and staring at their feet. Growing old and dying is a part of life.

It needs to be emphasized that truth never changes. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Any truth taught by our parents transcends time. It is only the ability to communicate and apply that truth that is generational.

THE BEST IS YET TO COME

Jesus taught that the Kingdom of heaven was like leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal. Quietly, and inexorably, the whole was leavened. In the same way the life of Jesus is quietly and inexorably filling the world. No earthly power can possibly stifle or retard the growth of His Body.

It has been said that the greatest revival of all time is taking place today in China. In spite of persecution, poverty, and problems which seem insurmountable, the church in China has been estimated to have between 55 and 100 million believers.

Similar revivals are also taking place in other parts of Asia, Africa, and Central and South America. It seems that the greatest growth is taking place in those parts of the world where the institutional church is the weakest.

Jesus said: **“Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.”**

When we “die,” God can replace the putrid nature

of our old life with the fragrance of Springtime and flowers. While outwardly we perish, inwardly we can be renewed every day. Death does not end all, it is the gateway to new power and new life.

“Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.” (Eph 1:15-23)

Self Destruction The Devil's M.O.

Every criminal has a certain "modus operandi." When he, or she, commits a crime, they invariably leave behind some distinguishing trademark. Career criminals may commit different crimes in different parts of the country, but their "M.O." remains the same. It is as distinct as their fingerprints. Try as we may, we cannot escape from ourselves.

The ultimate criminal, of course, is the devil. Jesus said that he was a liar from the beginning, and also a murderer. He is subtle and diabolically clever. He is fierce, cruel, and cowardly. There may be many similarities in the crimes which he commits, but "self destruction" is always a part of his modus operandi.

Remember the man whom Jesus men in the country of the Gadarenes? The demons who possessed him were many. Consequently they were named "Legion." The man himself was naked and cut himself with stones (Mark 5:5.) Why would anybody try to destroy themselves? The answer, of course, is that is standard operational procedure for the devil. He always gets people to try and destroy themselves. When Jesus cast out the demons, they were permitted to enter into a herd of swine. Touche! The devil did it again! Even the swine destroyed themselves.

We should not be surprised that Judas put his neck in a noose and jumped off a cliff. We should not be surprised that Adolf Hitler, Jim Jones and David Karesh also killed themselves. Self destruction is to be anticipated for those who are dealing with the devil.

Not every devotee to the devil has the "privilege" of putting a gun barrel in his own mouth. Mussolini, for example, was killed by a group of partisans who shot him down like a dog and hung him up by his heels. Comrade

Trotsky had a "friendly" visit from a fellow communist who buried a hatchet in his brain. Jezebel was thrown from an upper window and eaten by the dogs. Wicked Hamaan was hanged on his own gallows, etc. All who follow the devil are destroyed, only those who live long enough enjoy the privilege of self destruction.

Herod killed James with the sword, and when he saw that it pleased the people he tried to do the same for Peter. This wicked man received the just recompense of his reward, however, and was eaten of worms and died (Acts 12:23.) It is said in Scripture that the angel of the Lord smote him with this fatal affliction. There is a sense, however, in which the death of Herod is a tribute to the treachery and deceit of the devil. Herod's conduct insured his own destruction.

It is remarkable how many illnesses and injuries are self inflicted. Take, for example, the untimely death of men like Howard Hughes and Elvis Presley. They were both rich and famous, but destroyed themselves through the use of drugs. Others smoke themselves to death, or drink themselves to death, or eat themselves to death. The common thread in these crimes against nature is self destruction, the devil's M.O.

Venereal diseases are another manifestation of the devil's handiwork. Again we see the paradox of self worship becoming self destruction. Those who seek only their own gratification wind up without the ability to enjoy anything. Unfortunately, they also destroy a lot of innocent people at the same time they are destroying themselves. AIDS for example, not only infects the promiscuous, but also their wives and children.

Christians are commanded to come out from the world and be separate. Our citizenship is in heaven. We are only strangers and pilgrims on this earth. Sometimes the devil goes after us like a roaring lion, and other times like a slithering serpent. In either instance, however, he is the "destroyer." The devil is not omnipotent, or omniscient, but he is supernatural. He is smarter than we are, and

more powerful than we are. Our only hope for victory against him is by the power of Jesus Christ our Lord. We are sheep in the midst of wolves. Let us therefore, stay close to the Shepherd. Let us hear His voice, and follow where He leads!

Others May . . . You Cannot!

If God has called you to be really like Jesus, He will draw you into a life of crucifixion and humility, and put upon you such demands of obedience that you will not be able to follow other people, or measure yourself by other Christians, and in many ways He will seem to let other good people do things which He will not let you do.

Other Christians and ministers who seem very religious and useful may push themselves, pull wires, and work schemes to carry out their plans, but you cannot do it, and if you attempt it, you will meet with such failure and rebuke from the Lord as to make you sorely penitent.

Others may boast of themselves, of their work, of their successes, of their writings, but the Holy Spirit will not allow you to do any such thing, and if you begin it, He will lead you into some deep mortification that will make you despise yourself and all your good works.

Others may be allowed to succeed in making money, or may have a legacy left to them, but it is likely God will keep you poor, because He wants you to have something better than gold, namely, a helpless dependence upon Him, that He may have the privilege of supplying your needs each day out of an unseen treasury.

The Lord may let others be honored and put forward and keep you hidden in obscurity, because He wants to produce some choice, fragrant fruit for His coming glory, which can only be produced in the shade. He may let others do a work for Him, and get the credit for it, but He will make you work and toil on without knowing how much you are doing, and then to make your work still more precious, He may let others get credit for the work which you have done, and thus make your reward ten times greater when He comes.

The Holy Spirit will put a strict watch over you, with a jealous love, and will rebuke you for little words, and feelings, or for wasting your time, which other Christians

never feel distressed over.

So make up your mind that God is an Infinite Sovereign, and has a right to do as He pleases with His own. He may not explain to you a thousand things which puzzle your reason in His dealings with you, but if you absolutely sell yourself to be His love slave, He will wrap you up in a jealous love, and bestow upon you many blessings which come only to those who are in the inner circle.

Settle it forever, then, that you are to deal directly with the Holy Spirit, and that He is to have the privilege of tying your tongue, or chaining your hand, or closing your eyes, in ways that He does not seem to use with others. Now, when you are so possessed with the Living God that you are, in your secret heart, pleased and delighted with this peculiar, personal, private, jealous guardianship and management of the Holy Spirit over your life, you will have found the vestibule of heaven.

(Author unknown)

The Inalienable Right of the Ignorant

**“And if any man will be ignorant, let him be ignorant . . .” 1
Cor. 14:38**

Man was made in the image of God. We are not robots or puppets, we are decision makers. We even have the right to be wrong. We can eat forbidden fruit as did Adam and Eve. We can betray Jesus like Judas. We can murmur, complain, and speak great swelling words of vanity against the Sovereign of the Universe.

God, of course, can take care of such rebellious people. He has the power to deliver the godly out of temptation, and reserve the unjust for punishment. (II Pet. 2:9.) In the meanwhile, however, He has given instructions to the church. We have an obligation to our fellow Christians. If they commit fornication, we are to deliver them to Satan for the destruction of the flesh that their spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus (I Cor. 5:5.) If they are “disorderly” and do not work, we are to “withdraw from them (II Thess. 3:6.) If they cause divisions, they are to be marked and avoided (Rom. 16:17.) If they are heretics, they are to be warned twice and rejected (Tit. 3:10.) If they are only ignorant, however, they are to be politely left alone.

Someone once said: “I would rather keep my mouth shut and let people think I am ignorant, than to open it up and remove all doubt.” Such persons usually have a rather benign influence on others. They quite often come to church and cause no trouble. They usually select a back pew or balcony seat and quietly wait for the benediction. As long as they are allowed to be ignorant, they do not break furniture, shout obscenities, or divide the church. Should they suffer a brain ache, or mental charlie horse, however, all bets are off. Paul dealt with such people at

Corinth. He reminded them, that if any man thought himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, he was to acknowledge that the things which he wrote were commandments of the Lord. If any one, however, deliberately chose to be ignorant, Paul recommended that they be allowed to remain ignorant.

We must emphasize, of course, that God doesn't want us to be ignorant. He wants us to be wise concerning that which is good, and simple concerning that which is evil (Rom. 16:19.) We should not be ignorant of the devil's devices (II Cor. 2:11.) We should not be ignorant about those who have fallen asleep (I Thess. 4:13.) We should not be in darkness about the Day of His return (I Thess. 5:1-2.) But if any man makes a deliberate decision to be ignorant, even God will not intervene!

It would indeed be wonderful if the world was filled with logical and literate people with a great desire to learn. Such, however, is not the case, and never will be. Just as there will always be the poor, there will also always be the ignorant. If we instruct them with meekness, God may give them repentance (II Tim. 2:25.) If we treat them with love they may grow up to the place where they want to learn. If they do not grow up, however, don't stir them up to some work of the flesh, let them be ignorant.

It is inevitable that some seed will fall on rocky soil. Perhaps you have heard of the man who only combed his hair twice a year because it was so painful. Some people seldom think for the same reason. Should these people confess Christ and be baptized, that may represent the apex of their spiritual growth and development. God may ultimately choose to reject them for being barren and unfruitful. That, however, is His decision, not ours. We certainly should have compassion on the ignorant (Heb. 5:2.) We should be longsuffering toward all (I Thess. 5:14) But if any man will be ignorant, let him be ignorant!

Almost everyone has heard of a church that divided over some trivial matter like the size of a classroom, or the color of a carpet. Such divisions are a testament to what

ignorant people can do when they get angry. We may be well advised to leave them alone. Let them be ignorant. Let them sleep on and take their rest.

Not everyone, of course, need be left in ignorance. Some can be provoked to love and good works. Others can be raised from the dead like Lazarus. Yet it is both Scriptural and practical to leave some people to their ignorance. May God give you the wisdom to apply His words: "If any man will be ignorant, let him be ignorant!"

I Can Do That!

David Kelley recently sent a study that convinced me that I am more like the apostles than I thought I was. Quite frequently we see these men as so super spiritual that we could never do what they did. As I was reminded of these scriptures, however, I kept saying to myself "I can do that!"

For example, Jesus said they were fools and slow of heart to believe the prophets (Lk. 24:25.) Such a thought made me feel right at home. One day as they were traveling, they forgot to take provisions. Zounds! I said, "I can do that!" On another occasion they tried to cast out a demon and failed (Mk. 9:18.) Then they criticized a man who did cast out demons because he didn't follow them (Mk. 9:38.) Hey! I'm starting to feel right at home.

Then there was the time the Samaritans refused them hospitality and they wanted to call down fire from heaven and destroy them (Lk. 9:54.) Or what about the time they rebuked those who brought little infants to Jesus (Lk. 18:15?) Or what about the time they didn't understand Jesus and were afraid to ask (Mk. 9:32?) By this time I'm starting to think: "Hey! I'm apostolic timber" after all."

Then there are those many references to "fear" in the apostles. They were afraid in a boat (Lk. 8:25.) They were afraid on a mountain (Mk. 9:6.) When they saw Jesus walking on the water and were afraid (John 6:19.) When Peter saw the wind and waves he also was afraid (Matt. 14:30.) On the way to Jerusalem they were "amazed and afraid" (Mk. 10:32.) After the resurrection they didn't say anything to any man because they were afraid (Mk. 16:8.) Maybe all of us are more like the apostles than we thought we were!

The apostles disputed among themselves about which of them was the greatest (Mk. 9:34.) On another occasion they were moved with indignation against their brethren (Matt. 20:24.) They criticized Mary for her

generosity (Matt. 26:8.) They also had wrongful indignation against her (Mk. 14:4.) They slept while Jesus prayed (Lk. 9:32.) They fled at the time of His arrest (Matt. 26:56.) They refused to believe the testimony about His resurrection (Mk. 16:11.) At the time Jesus gave them the Great Commission, some still doubted (Matt. 28:17.)

Please consider these words of Scripture: **"And it came to pass in those days, that He went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, He called unto Him His disciples: and of them He chose twelve, whom also He named apostles" (Lk. 6:12-13.)**

The apostles of Jesus were carefully chosen after a night of prayer. He selected men who were quite ordinary. In fact, they were just like us. We can identify with their lives. We can do many of the things they did, and we can also understand their fears and frustrations.

But wait! There were also other things which the apostles did. They denied themselves and took up a cross. They left their homes and went into all the world to preach the Gospel. They were constantly in danger, and most died as martyrs. They had thousands of converts and many remarkable answers to prayer. Is it possible that we can do these things too?

Yes we can! Apostolic power came from Jesus. These men would have been total failures on their own. That's why Jesus commanded them not to try it by themselves. He said to **"wait for the promise of the Father" (Acts 1:4.)** He promised them: **"But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you . . ." (Acts 1:8.)**

This same power is available to us today. **"And now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think according to the power that worketh in us. Unto Him be glory in the church . . . (Eph. 3:20-21.)**

Out of Control

Ben Merold said recently at a Church Growth Seminar: "All good growth will be out of control." Zounds! I thought. He's right!

Everyone knows that nothing is out of control to God. That's obvious! Ben evidently meant that all good church growth is out of man's control.

He further explained that in the course of teaching hundreds of students on the graduate level, he required many research projects. One such project involved studying church records. The students discovered that every six to nine years the average church experienced numerical growth. When the church tried to "control" this growth, however, it disappeared. It is not at all uncommon for some churches to stay the same size for decades. One reason for such lack of growth, involves control. Our efforts to control church growth is an indicator that we have more confidence in ourselves than we do in God.

Let's consider an example straight from the Bible. Suppose you are a part of a congregation of 120, and you had 3,000 converts in a single day. This, as you know, is precisely what happened to the church in Jerusalem. Can you not appreciate the level of discomfort this would bring to the average church board? Things would be out of their control. How would they protect their original little group from false teaching? Such a large influx of new believers would be seen as a grave danger to true doctrine. It would be the tail wagging the dog. In such a large congregation, people would be teaching without any man's approval or credentials. Even with twelve inspired apostles on the scene, such numbers are demonstrably unmanageable by man.

The problem of control was magnified, however, by the fact that these 3,000 new converts were evangelistic. Once again the fear of false teaching rears its ugly head. How can a conscientious board member tolerate anything

so out of control? Soon their number was 5,000 men (Acts 4:4,) and probably not one had even received a Baptismal Certificate. Based on today's mentality, many board members would be forced to resign as a matter of conscience. Since things were out of their "control," they would automatically assume that apostasy was inevitable.

It has been estimated that the Jerusalem church had grown to over 20,000 before they saw the need of deacons. And then, of all things, they only appointed seven. We have congregations today with only a hundred members that have this many deacons. These men in the Jerusalem Church, however, were not appointed to control, but to serve.

Then the problem of control by man was made even more difficult by persecution. Stephen was stoned and these thousands of uncontrolled believers were scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria. From the human standpoint, the situation was manifestly unmanageable. Fortunately, Jesus never lost control of anyone or anything. No matter where believers were, or what problems they faced, Jesus was in control. It is a great relief to remember that the Head of the Body is not separated from the members of His Body.

Perhaps the greatest church growth ever is taking place in modern times. The Iron Curtain is down, and an evangelistic fervor is sweeping Eastern Europe and Russia. Parts of Africa are aflame with evangelism. Only a few short years ago there were hardly any Christians in Korea. Now the biggest churches in the world are there. The evangelism of China is even more exciting. Some have estimated that there are more evangelical Christians in China than in any country on earth. Just as in the First Century, this amazing growth has been out of control. The wind blows where it wants to. We can hear the sound, but we cannot tell where it comes from, or where it is going. This is precisely the illustration that Jesus used to describe those who are born of the Spirit.

The Big Bang?

(Condensed from an article by F. W. Schnitzler in Chalcedon, Aug. '95)

The Ancient Egyptians believed the god Osiris brought life to the Nile river valley through an annual ritual of copulation. The Greeks explained life by a bizarre combination of gods, nymphs, cyclops, and minotaurs. The Romans believed their beginning involved Romulus and Remus. These, as you know, were the twin sons of the war-god Mars and one of the virgin-priestesses. Modern Americans have their own mythology. It is known as "The Big Bang Theory."

The very idea that a gigantic explosion can produce order is quite comical. We were forced to such nonsense, however, by the theory of evolution. Science "had to" come up with "evidence" for an evolving universe.

One theory devised to meet this need was the "Big Bang." It was proposed in the mid-1920's by Edwin Hubble. He peered through his telescope and saw "redshifts." Based on this information, he assumed that our universe was expanding. Next, he theorized that the universe was once together, and then exploded. This, he concluded, produced life as we now know it. This gave to science what seemed to be a "rational" alternative to God. Though the theory is totally absurd, it gained rapid acceptance in the scientific world. Consider, for example, two of the "biggest bangs" ever witnessed by man. These occurred at Nagasaki and Hiroshima. The very idea that these gargantuan explosions produced order is intellectually bankrupt. It is as outlandish and laughable as the mythology of the ancient pagans. Nevertheless, it is accepted with religious fervor and zeal by many in our modern world.

Have you noticed, however, that science books become outdated quite quickly? Each generation arrogantly assumes it has arrived at "truth," only to be

laughed at by others a few years later.

This may be happening to the Big Bang Theory before our very eyes. William Tift, an astronomer at the University of Arizona, has been collecting data for more than two decades. His information leads him to conclude that our universe may not be expanding. It is reported that the Astrophysical Journal grudgingly published his revolutionary discoveries. His first redshift paper was: "Discrete States of Redshift and Galaxy Dynamics." Though they could not dispute his data, neither could they endorse his conclusions. The scientific community is apparently as prejudiced as the rest of society.

Discover magazine reported recently that the universe is much younger than generally assumed and that we have "too little mass, and too little time" for the Big Bang Theory to be true. The Washington Post Weekly Edition, reported that 90% of the cosmos seems to be missing: "That is, the total amount of matter we can see - in the form of stars, dust and miscellaneous debris - simply does not contain anywhere near enough mass to hold itself together in the shape of galaxies or clusters of galaxies."

David Weinberg, an astronomer at Ohio State University admitted, "If these results are confirmed, we theorists will be in trouble. We really have no good ways of explaining these observations."

Gresham Machen summed it up beautifully:

"There is an ultimate mystery before which the knowledge of the wisest man is dumb. The presence of that mystery is revealed to different men in different ways. Certainly it is not obscured one whit by modern achievements, for the widening of the circle of human knowledge only increases the periphery of dreadful contact with the unknown. And even within the little circle of knowledge, mystery touches us at a thousand points."

Deadheads

The fans and followers of Jerry Garcia are known as "Deadheads." His band, as you know, was called "The Grateful Dead." The Washington Post said it was a "band that emphasized freedom." The New York Times said they embodied "psychedelic optimism."

Wolfgang and Lisa Von Nester are "Deadheads." They are counted among the thousands of nomadic followers of Garcia who roam the country displaying their "freedom," and "psychedelic optimism." On June 2, they abandoned their three year-old son at a San Bernardino mall. Wolfgang explained: "I figured that without food and without money and without diapers to put on his butt what else could I do." Your heart will be touched to know that Wolfgang "walked away in tears." Like faithful "Deadheads," however, Wolfgang and Lisa dried their tears, and found enough money for bus tickets to a Grateful Dead concert in San Francisco. Then they met a truck driver who helped them get back home to Maryland. There they boasted of abandoning their son and took a nature hike on the Appalachian Trail. It was here that a sheriff's investigator detained Lisa on a 1993 warrant. It seems that she had failed to show up in a child support case involving her four other children.

Garcia was a "free spirit" in his own right too. He dropped out of school in 1959 and enlisted in the army to get away from his family. Nine months later he was dishonorably discharged. He grew a goatee and began hanging around the "music scene" in Palo Alto. He became part of a group known as the Warlocks. The group included Garcia, Bob Weir, and "Pigpen" McKerman. Pigpen was famous for his messianic live performances of "Turn On Your Lovelight." Unfortunately, he died of liver damage in 1973. Naturally, as a part of the free spirited sixties, the Warlocks did large doses of LSD. The name,

"Grateful Dead," came from a British ballad that told of a ghost finding peace through human help. Garcia's "free" lifestyle, however, began to catch up with him. In 1985 he was busted for doing coke and heroin. In 1986 he came out of a diabetic coma with his brain so scrambled that he forgot how to play the guitar. In 1992 he collapsed from exhaustion and had to cancel tour dates. His health problems with heroin were compounded by smoking, obesity, an enlarged heart, and congested lungs.

Carolyn Buff, a news aide for the Washington Post, has been a Deadhead for seven years. Not long ago she wrote: "Every time there is a scare that the Dead may stop touring, I find myself worrying about those lost souls who know nothing else but the parallel world of the Grateful Dead." These "Deadheads" are such devoted followers that they will beg for tickets crying, "I need a miracle." If that fails, they will kick down fences, throw bottles, and crash gates to attend a concert.

Garcia was nearing the end of the trail. He was struggling to make a go of his third marriage. He was looking forward to the wedding plans of his oldest daughter. He was also planning a fall tour, but the monkey was on his back and wouldn't let go. In desperation he checked in at the Betty Ford Center at Rancho Mirage, Calif. He checked out on Aug. 1, his 53rd birthday. A week later he checked in at a small private clinic. At about 4:00 a.m., Wed. Aug. 9, 1995, a counselor walked by and noticed that Garcia had stopped snoring.

President Clinton eulogized the dead singer on MTV. He said that Garcia had "a great gift. And he even wound up putting out that line of ties. He had great ties. I would go around wearing Jerry Garcia ties and giving them away to people. So I was very sad when he died."

I'm said too! I'm not only sad about Jerry Garcia, but also for his thousands of fans. When the blind lead the blind, both fall into the ditch!

Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is the science of interpretation. The name is derived from the Greek "Hermes" who was believed to be the messenger of the gods. His magic wand had the power to close the eyes of mortals, to cause dreams, and to wake the slumbering. The word is now applied to the way we read and understand the Bible. The subject is indeed relevant, for our "hermeneutic" determines both our life style and our eternal destiny.

This was brought vividly to mind by the story of Randy and Vicki Weaver in the August 28th, NEWSWEEK. They were married in 1971 and were in the process of experiencing the "American Dream." They lived in the nicest house on the block, and owned a Mustang, Corvette, and Triumph. They became ashamed, however, of their hedonistic lifestyle, and moved to the wilds of northern Idaho. The reason for this abrupt change was their "hermeneutic."

They called themselves legalists, because they believed the Bible was the literal word of God. Based upon their understanding of Scripture, they concluded that the forces of the Soviet Union, the U.S. Government, and Jewish bankers, were ready to strike against the American people. A passage from Ezekiel was read: "Son of man, (Christian Americans,) set they face against Gog, (the grand conspiracy,) . . . And I will call for a sword against him throughout all my mountains, saith the Lord God." Randy collected an arsenal of weapons and slept with a loaded pistol under his pillow.

As you know, this hermeneutic resulted in the death of his wife, Vicki, their son, Samuel, and a Deputy Marshal, William Degan. The bizarre and bloody confrontation at Ruby Ridge also resulted in a shakeup in the F.B.I., and a \$3.1 million settlement to Randall Weaver, and their three surviving children

The people of God have always had their own

"hermeneutic." Quite frequently, it has been wrong. When Jesus was placed on trial, for example, the irreligious Roman ruler was about to let Him go. Pilate brought Jesus out to the people and declared, "**I find no fault in him!**" The Jews, however, had been studying the Bible. They answered: "**We have a law, and by our law he ought to die . . .**" (John 10:7.)

Please fine tune your focus on this remarkable situation. Jesus was "God manifest in the flesh." It was His Holy Spirit that inspired the writing of the Bible. The Jewish people had been given the Bible. To them pertained "**the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises**" (Rom. 9:4.) They not only studied the Bible, they committed large portions to memory. They wrote it on the door posts of their homes, and bound it around their foreheads. They counted the "jots" and "tittles," of the Law and claimed to reverence God in all they did. Yet, they interpreted the Bible in such a way, that they crucified the Author of the Bible.

When Jesus was upon the earth, it was the "common people" who heard Him gladly (Mk. 12:37.) They didn't need to split theological hairs or debate the meaning of a Hebrew verb. They simply followed Jesus! The word "theology," literally means the "Word of God." The theology of the common people was therefore quite simple. It was Jesus! Jesus was their theology. They simply followed in His steps, and did what He wanted them to do.

The word "creed," comes from the Latin "credo," which means, "I believe." The oldest creeds are the most simple. "Jesus is Lord," for example, is a Biblical creed (I Cor. 12:3.) Later creeds were larger and more complex. By the time of the Reformation, the creeds were so complicated that it was necessary to write commentaries to explain them. This period was characterized by religious wars, fought by factions in the "Christian faith." Let's return to the simple hermeneutic of the First Century, and simply focus on following Jesus!

Creatures or Creator

"Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshiped and served the creature more than the Creator . . . (Rom. 1:25.)

Our value system provides an interesting index to our worship. We "worship," that upon which we bestow "worth." The book of Romans warns of those who worship and serve the "creature," more than the "Creator." They place more "worth" upon the earth, than the God who created it. Such people, of course, are pagans! When they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, neither were they thankful. Because they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, He gave them over to a reprobate mind and perversion.

I thought of this recently while reading a column by Chuck Shepherd in the Super Express, Aug. 30, 1995. Raphael Dale Rodriguez, of Van Nuys, Calif., was charged with beating his girl friend and strangling her pet rabbit. He could be fined \$1,000 for beating his girl friend, but \$20,000 for strangling the rabbit. A similar story came out of Oklahoma City. Two police officers were in trouble, one for beating his girl friend so severely that he ruptured her ear drum, the other for kicking a cat at the airport. Beating a girl carries a maximum penalty of 90 days in jail. Kicking a cat could get you five years.

Mobsters have seen the handwriting on the wall and tried to cash in on the earth worship craze. Salvador Avellino, Jr., who recently pleaded guilty to conspiracy charges in the murder of two haulers, was responsible for the most famous trash barge in history. In March 1987, he loaded one in New York with 3188 tons of trash and sent it to Mobro, North Carolina. Since he was new in the business, he did not make prior arrangements. This oversight raised fear that the shipment was contaminated with hazardous waste. It was refused!

The news media picked up the story and followed

the barge to Louisiana, Mexico, and the Bahamas. The illusion was created that there was no place on earth left to deposit trash. Finally, the trash was returned to New York and burned in an incinerator. Actually, there is plenty of room for trash. Clark Wiseman, a professor of Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington computes that a single tract of ground 30 miles square would be sufficient to handle trash for the entire U.S. for a thousand years.

According to the July, 1995, READER'S DIGEST, even the need to recycle is a myth. They say:

"Curbside recycling doesn't pay. It costs residents and local governments hundreds of millions of dollars more than can be recouped by selling the sorted trash. It can require hugh new fleets of collection trucks that add to traffic congestion and pollution. And landfill space, in the nation as a whole, turns out to be both plentiful and extremely cheap."

Adam and Eve were placed in a Garden and commissioned to "dress and keep" it. Certainly, godly people have always sought to be good stewards of all the resources God has placed at their disposal. Godly people, however, put God first, and pagans do not. This is a definite line of demarcation. Pagans worship and serve the creation, more than the Creator.

The "New Age" movement is nothing new. It is merely paganism repackaged for the Twentieth Century. It exalts the creation, and deprecates the Creator. It protects the baby seal, but aborts baby children. It celebrates the lions right to kill because it is "nature." It denies the human's right to hunt as cruel and abusive. It places more value on a tree, than a job, or a person. It lectures society about morality, while wallowing in personal immorality. Truly, God has given them over to a reprobate mind to do those things which are not convenient.

Exercise!

". . . exercise thyself rather unto godliness" (I Tim. 4:7.)

I am indebted to Tony Evans for pointing out to me the obvious. Joining a health club doesn't make you healthy. Physical fitness does not result from joining up and paying dues. You have to exercise in order to be healthy!

The application to the spiritual is equally obvious. Paul told Timothy to refuse old wife's fables, and exercise himself unto godliness. Bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable unto all things. Godliness helps us both in this world, and also in the world which is to come.

Almost everyone has seen expensive exercise equipment gathering dust in a forgotten corner of someone's garage. Slim and trim people demonstrate this type of apparatus every day on television. They make it look easy. They smile as they show us how to make those ugly pounds vanish like a vapor. Joining health clubs, and buying expensive contraptions, however, doesn't make us healthy. No one can be truly healthy without exercise. Unfortunately, exercise isn't easy. Exercise requires energy and effort. Exercise demands self denial. There is a price to pay, other than money, for physical health.

Thousands of people join the church each year to gain spiritual health. Some may even buy a Bible, or subscribe to a Christian magazine. Our good intentions are to be commended, but hell will be full of people with good intentions. Good intentions are not enough! There is no way to have spiritual health without spiritual exercise.

I met a man in Iowa some years ago who brought his jogging clothes to church. It was "only" a couple of miles home, and he "enjoyed" the exercise. "For two years," he said, "I hated jogging." He forced himself, however, to do it anyway. His discipline paid off. After two years of painful exertion, he crossed a threshold. The pain

was gone. He was on a "runner's high." There was a sparkle in his eye, and a spring in his step. He was alive with energy. He was vibrant and enthusiastic. That which he once dreaded, now became the focus of joyful expectation. Exercise had become an exhilarating experience!

The same is true with spiritual exercise. The first couple of years you read the Bible, it too may be painful and difficult. There will be words you don't understand, and concepts which seem foreign and strange. With enough exercise, however, the study of Scripture can become exhilarating. The Bible is filled with exceeding great and precious promises that are waiting to be discovered.

Prayer too, may also be boring and mechanical at first. After exercising yourself unto godliness, however, prayer can empower you to mount up with wings like an eagle. Prayer has the potential to enable you to run and now grow weary, and to walk and not faint (Is. 40:31.) It can enable you to do exceeding abundantly above all that you can ask or think (Eph. 3:20.)

I'm sure you see the principle. Discipline is an integral part of discipleship. If you want to follow Jesus, you have no alternative. You must deny yourself daily, and take up a cross. What Jesus began to do in the body, The Body continues to do in Jesus. Let's deny ourselves, and start exercising!

A Famous Prayer

Joe Wright, minister of the Central Christian Church in Wichita, ignited a storm of protest by offering this prayer before Kansas legislators.

"Heavenly Father, we come before You today to ask Your forgiveness and seek your direction and guidance. We know Your word says 'Woe to those who call evil good,' but that is what we have done. We have lost our spiritual equilibrium and inverted our values.

We have worshiped other gods and called it multiculturalism.

We have endorsed perversion, and called it an alternative lifestyle.

We have exploited the poor and called it the lottery.

We have neglected the needy and called it self preservation.

We have rewarded laziness and called it welfare.

We have killed our unborn and called it 'choice.'

We have shot abortionists and called it justifiable.

We have neglected to discipline our children and called it building self esteem.

We have abused power and called it political savvy.

We have polluted the air with profanity and pornography and called it freedom of expression.

We have ridiculed the time-honored values of our forefathers and called it enlightenment.

Search us, O God, and know our hearts today. Try us and see if there be some wicked way in us. Cleanse us from every sin and set us free.

Guide and bless these men and women who have been sent here by the people of Kansas, and who have been ordained by You to govern this great state. Grant them Your wisdom to rule, and may their decisions direct us to the center of Your will. I ask it in the name of Your Son, the Living Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen!"

Rep. Delbert Gross, a Democrat from Hays, went to the microphone and said: "I have never heard in 10 years as divisive, sanctimonious, self-serving, self-righteous and overbearing a prayer as I have heard this morning. The man of the cloth who spoke this morning did this body a disservice."

Reps. David Haley, from Kansas City, and Sabrina Standifer from Wichita, both Democrats, followed Gross to the microphone and said: "I took umbrage at the prayer we had to suffer through this morning." That pastor "can do that in his own church, where maybe they worship snakes," but it wasn't appropriate in the Kansas House. "It was blasphemous and it was ignorant."

Gross and Haley said they were upset that the prayer equated laziness with welfare and suggested that tolerance of other creeds and cultures was the same as worshipping false gods.

The comments of these Democrats are now a part of the House's public record. None of the Republicans went to the microphone, but Rep. Tony Powell, a Wichita Republican who worships with the Central Christian Church said: "I'm glad to see our liberal friends advocate censoring prayer as the answer to our problems."

(Condensed from releases by the Associated Press, and Harris News service)

Some People Are Wrong!

The Fourfold Gospel, by J. W. McGarvey, lists these Samaritan traditions. They believed that:

- Paradise was on the summit of Mt. Gerizim
- Adam was formed of the dust of Mt. Gerizim
- Adam built his first altar on Mt. Gerizim
- Seth reared his first altar on Mt. Gerizim
- Mt. Gerizim was the Ararat on which the Ark

rested

- Noah built his altar on Mt. Gerizim
- Abraham attempted to offer Isaac on Mt. Gerizim
- Abraham met Melchizedek on Mt. Gerizim
- Here was the real Bethel where Jacob received

his vision

Consequently, the Samaritans built a temple, and worshiped on Mt. Gerizim. The Samaritans, however, were wrong! Jesus said so! He said to the Samaritan woman: **"Ye worship ye know not what" (John 4:22.)** The Samaritan apostasy can be traced all the way back to Jeroboam the son of Nebat. I Kings 15:26-33, and other passages tell us that Jeroboam fabricated a false religion to save his own kingdom. Lies and falsehood were therefore woven throughout the whole fabric of Samaritan worship. No matter how you slice it, the Samaritans were wrong!

I thought of this while reading an article by George Will in the Feb. 19, 1996 NEWSWEEK. It seems that Dr. Yosef A. A. Ben-Jochannan delivered the Martin Luther King memorial lecture at Wellesley College. Though he is not a scholar of Egyptian language or civilization, he was advertised as "a distinguished Egyptologist."

Dr. Ben-Jochannan offered the Afro-centrist's charge that Greek civilization was stolen from Africa. He said that Aristotle acquired his philosophy by plundering the library at Alexandria. Mary Lefkowitz, a scholar of antiquity, asked him how this could be since, (1) The library was not

built until after Aristotle's death, and (2) there is no historical evidence that Aristotle ever went to Egypt.

The good doctor said he "resented the tone of the question." Several students accused Lefkowitz of racism. When she further dared to question that Socrates, Hannibal and Cleopatra were Africans, she was told that her attitude was "McCarthyite in its intolerance."

At the risk of being politically incorrect, we must face the fact that some people are just wrong. Two plus two is not nine. If every person on earth signed an affidavit that $2+2=9$, it would still be wrong. Truth is not a subjective feeling, it is an objective reality.

Adolf Hitler popularized the "big lie" tactic. He theorized that public opinion could be swayed by an advertising blitzkrieg. He operated on the assumption that no matter how big the lie, it could and would be believed, if it was repeated often enough. He fooled all of the people some of the time, and some of the people all of the time. Fortunately, however, he didn't fool all of the people all of the time. His lies and deception have been sanitized by the light of truth. Consequently, even in this day of political correctness, it is still safe to vilify Hitler. His name is synonymous with evil in the modern world.

Take heart! There is hope! Truth may seem dead today, but someday it will rise again in triumph. Every generation has to rewrite the "truths" of science. Their "truths" blossom and wither like the seasonal flowers. The Truth of God, by contrast, is eternally the same. Someday the universe will acknowledge that God is true and every man a liar. Someday, every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. The fact that He is always right is the source of our eternal hope!

The Country of the Blind

(Condensed from a fiction classic by H. G. Wells)

Long years ago a handful of Peruvian families became isolated in the wildest waste of the Ecuadorean Andes. They were trapped in a beautiful valley, with sweet water, rich pasture, and all their hearts could desire.

A strange disease, however, caused all of their children to be blind. The process developed so slowly that they hardly noticed their loss. They memorized every part of their little world and when the last sighted person died, their race lived on.

Fourteen generations later, a mountaineer slipped on the snow and fell a thousand feet to a rocky precipice from which he could see their valley. Though badly shaken, not a bone was broken. Carefully he made his way to the throat of a gorge and beheld a sunlit meadow with clusters of stone huts. Each home had a door, but no windows.

He had heard legends about the Valley of the Blind and boldly approached three men carrying pails on yokes. They curiously felt all over his body and expressed grave concern over his eyes. They were bulged out, with fluttering lids.

He was taken to elders with concern that his senses were imperfect. These blind men could hear the beating of a man's heart at a dozen paces. They could distinguish one another by the sense of smell as easily as a dog. They were concerned by his irrational references to the meaningless word "sight."

The eldest blind man explained how the world began. He meant, of course, their valley. At first, it was only an empty hollow. Then came inanimate things, without the gift of touch. Then llamas, and a few other wild creatures. Apparently birds were considered to be angels as they could be heard, but never touched. Then came

man. Time, they said, was divided into warm and cold. It was, of course, best to sleep in the warm and work in the cold.

An old proverb declares that in the land of the blind, the one eyed man is king. Such, however, was not to be. Each time the pilgrim tried to show them the value of sight, he was thwarted. Once, for example, he saw Pedro coming. He was easily seen, but beyond the sense of hearing or smell. "In a few moments," he predicted, "Pedro will be here." Instead, Pedro turned his steps and went in the opposite direction. Again they laughed and mocked this thing called "sight."

Finally he fell in love with a young maiden. She was not highly esteemed, because her closed eyes were not sunken like everyone else's. The young men, however, expressed grave concern that a man with diseased eyes would corrupt their race. The elders expressed a similar fear that the fluttering of his eye lids placed his brain in a state of constant irritation. For the marriage to be consummated, these "bulges," which irritated the brain, would have to be removed.

On the last day, before surrendering his sight to blind surgeons, the lonely pilgrim beheld the morning like an angel in golden armor. He meant to go to a little meadow and look at flowers until the hour of his sacrifice would come. Instead, however, he began to climb. He dared to cross over the wall that surround their little world of darkness. Instinctively he clawed his way upward. Throughout the long day he braved the hazards of the steep cliffs and dangerous gorges. When sunset came, he was bruised and bleeding in many places. His clothes were torn, and his limbs were aching. He was alive, however, and he could see. He lay down under the cold stars with a smile on his face. He had escaped from the Valley of the Blind, where he thought he could be king.

There is a point to this parable, can you see it?

Rewriting Romans

It is obvious, by comparison with the emphasis of our modern age, that the book of Romans needs to be rewritten. By modern standards, it is too "generic" and misses many important issues that we would have addressed.

First, Paul should have said something about the sins of Nero. This cruel despot ordered the murder of his mother, his brother, and his first wife. His second wife died from his own personal abuse. His life was characterized by unbridled indulgence of every kind. Later he would set fire to Rome and blame it on the Christians. Later he would put thousands of Christians to death, and order the execution of Paul himself. Nero was cruel, despotic, and immoral. Obviously, by modern standards, his sins should have been pointed out. Perhaps Paul could have made a difference in the politics of ancient Rome if only he had made an issue of the sins of Nero. With a little encouragement, the Christians may have even overthrown his ungodly despotism, and installed a Christian democracy like we would have wanted them to.

Second, Paul said nothing about the abolition of slavery. There was a time, in Italy, when three out of every four people were enslaved. Our modern movie, *Spartacus*, reveals some of the problems with slavery in ancient Rome. From our perspective, an "anti-slavery" movement was obviously needed. From our perspective, Paul missed a golden opportunity to make slavery an issue.

Then there were the twin problems of pornography and prostitution. Both were rampant in Rome. Some became prostitutes, as you know, in service to their pagan gods. Pornography was everywhere, and plays for the public were so vile and vicious they would even shock an audience in our own degenerate age. We need to ask ourselves this question. Why didn't Paul make an issue out

of pornography and prostitution?

Divorce was also in epidemic proportion in ancient Rome. Led by the dissolute example of corrupt politicians, multiple marriages were the order of the day. Another golden opportunity was missed to outline a strategy for divorce recovery groups and single parents. You see, another important issue failed to find expression in the book of Romans.

Then, there was the ugly monster of substance abuse. It too had taken its cruel toll among the inhabitants of Rome. Alcohol and drugs had strewn the city with a wreckage of human debris that seems to have been totally overlooked by Paul.

Neither did he say anything about eating disorders. The old "feather down the throat" trick was proverbial in ancient Rome. Deranged people, with appetites out of control, would glut and vomit on a daily basis. Why didn't Paul address this important issue?

Abortion, infanticide, and child abandonment were also common. Professional slave traders would scour the city dump in search of abandoned babies. These poor children, if they lived, would never know the joy of freedom. Or consider the Coliseum. It was a major source of entertainment for the citizens of ancient Rome. Massive unemployment led to increased paternalism as the government tried to keep the rabble entertained. Both animals and men, died by the thousands to satiate the sadistic desires of ungodly people. Why didn't Paul address this issue in his letter to the Romans?

A candid consideration of Christian literature in our own day reveals that we focus on a great many "issues." It is equally obvious that Paul didn't! This leads to the conclusion that Paul needs to learn something from us, or we need to learn something from him.

Obviously, Paul was right! His letter saw to it that the main thing was to keep the main thing the main thing. He did it once. Let's do it again!

A Stork or an Ostrich

Job said: "Ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee . . . (Job 12:7.) Obviously, there are some lessons in life which we can learn from such creatures. Consider, for example, the stork and the ostrich.

The Hebrew word for "stork" comes from the root word meaning "constant, loving, and loyal." In Palestine the stork became a symbol of parental loyalty and love. Perhaps this is the reason for the famous fable about storks bringing little children into the world. Every parent could profit from the examples of loyalty and faithfulness of many creatures created by God.

The "ostrich," however, was not a good parent. Maybe we could learn something from her too. In Lamentations 4:3 the Scriptures accuse the daughters of Israel of being "cruel like the ostriches in the wilderness." **"Even the sea monsters draw out the breast, they give suck to their young ones: the daughter of my people is become cruel, like the ostriches in the wilderness."**

Even more explicit are the words of Job regarding how the ostrich treats her eggs. She leaves them in the earth unmindful that someone might step on them, or that a wild beast might crush them. **"She is hardened against her young ones as though they were not hers . . . God hath deprived her of wisdom, neither hath he imparted to her understanding" (Job 39:15-17.)**

Today we speak of people as: "wise as an owl," "sly as a fox," or "strong as an ox." In ancient times there was a similar expression: "more foolish than an ostrich." Great collections of tamed animals and birds date back beyond 2,000 B.C. so it is possible that Job may have had tamed ostriches living around his tent.

The ostrich is by far, the biggest living bird. An adult cock may stand eight feet tall and weigh 300 pounds. It can run 50 miles per hour. It does have a reputation,

however, for stupidity. Many picture the ostrich with its head buried in the sand oblivious to reality. Some think that one of the Hebrew words for "ostrich" comes from the root word for "greedy." Ostriches do have the habit of swallowing inedible objects which sometimes proves fatal.

Remember that we are dealing with a statement of Scripture: **"GOD HATH DEPRIVED HER OF WISDOM, NEITHER HATH HE IMPARTED TO HER UNDERSTANDING."** The reason for this harsh assessment is because of the way that the ostrich treats her young. First of all she does not take proper care of her eggs. She leaves them in the dust oblivious to the fact that these unguarded unborn babies might be destroyed. Furthermore: **"She is hardened against her young as though they were not her's: her labor is in vain without fear." (Job 39:16)**

Perhaps God deprived the ostrich of wisdom for a purpose. Maybe He wanted to give all women in every generation an example to avoid. It is irresponsible and dumb not to care for an unborn baby. Today, as you know, mothers are killing 1.5 million babies in the womb each year by means of abortion. Multiplied thousands of other babies are born defective because of the selfish and irresponsible way their mothers have chosen to live. At least the mother ostrich, with her head in the sand, is not destroying her unborn baby with alcohol, drugs, or venereal disease.

Storks are not the only parents with virtue, and ostriches are not the only parents who are stupid. Most parents can be both virtuous and stupid. Hopefully, we will learn something from the beasts and fowls that will help us, not only here, but hereafter. Nobody's eyesight has been impaired by looking on the bright side.

The Curse of Ritualistic Religion

"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves" (Matt. 23:15.)

The degenerative effect of Jewish religion is obvious. Each new generation of converts became progressively worse. When Moses received the Law on Mt. Sinai the people were bad. When Jesus was born they were worse. The first High Priest was bad, and it was downhill from there on out. By the time Jesus was on trial the High Priest was perhaps the most corrupt person in the entire nation. Yet, the religion they espoused, and the rituals they observed, were divinely ordained. These laws, as you know, were not intended to make man righteous. They were a schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ that we might be justified by faith. Worship by rote and ritual is debilitating.

God has always intended to make us free. He even described His own rituals as a prison (Gal. 3:23), weak and beggarly elements which kept us in bondage (Gal. 4:9), shadows and not reality (Co. 2:17), death and not life (II Cor. 3:7). He never intended us to be restricted by ritual forever. He always wanted us to have the freedom to worship Him in Spirit and in truth. He has redeemed us from the curse of the law. He has brought us into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

Max Lucado in his book **"AND THE ANGELS WERE SILENT,"** tells the story of Hans Babblinger. He lived in Ulm, Germany in the sixteenth century. He wanted to fly. He made a pair of wings and ascended the Bavarian Alps. Strong updrafts are common in the region. On that memorable day he amazed his friends by soaring safely to the ground.

When the king came to town the local Bishop wanted to impress him. He prevailed upon Hans for an exhibition of flying. This time, however, they did not ascend the high Alps. They chose instead to fly in the lowlands from the bluffs of the Danube. It was a poor choice. Without the dynamic lift from the mountain breeze, Hans fell like a rock to the river below. The next Sunday the embarrassed Bishop proclaimed from the pulpit that "Man was not meant to fly." Hans put his wings away and never tried to fly again.

The Cathedral at Ulm is now empty. Most of its visitors are tourists who have traveled there in an airplane.

It was at about this time that Galileo Galilei devised a thermometer and a telescope. He became intoxicated by the thrill of learning. He challenged the traditional views of the church and espoused the teaching of Copernicus. He believed that the earth revolved around the sun, and not vice versa. On April 12, 1633 he was brought before a church tribunal and forced to kneel down and recant his views. He was sentenced to perpetual imprisonment. He died on Jan. 8, 1642. His church had succeeded in keeping him from ever tasting another breath of fresh air and freedom.

God is not the Author of confusion. He can be trusted to orchestrate and direct the members of His own Body. It is not necessary for finite man to become a Messiah in order for the church to be saved. One Savior is sufficient. Jesus has already promised that the gates of hell will never prevail against His Church.

Solomon said: "Go to the ant . . . consider her ways and be wise" (Prov. 6:6-8.) The ant has no "guide, overseer, or ruler" and yet the ant hill is a model of order and design. If man should attempt to organize an ant hill, he would only interrupt the flow of God's creative design.

Every attempt to create or promote worship by means of rote and ritual, is as irrational and unnecessary as attempting to organizing an ant hill.