

The A and the Z

Four times in the Book of Revelation Jesus is called the "Alpha" and the "Omega." He is the first letter of the alphabet, and He is also the last letter too. He is the beginning and the end . . . but He is also everything in between.

The English alphabet has 26 letters. There have literally been millions of volumes written in English – some are romantic, others are scientific. Some are hilarious comedies, and others are heart rending tragedies. Some are simple books for little children, and others are so deep and technical that they require an Einstein to understand them. But all of these volumes are written with the same 26 letters.

In much the same fashion Jesus is the entire vocabulary of God. In Him dwells the fullness of the Godhead in a body. Everything that Deity desires to communicate to man is expressed through Jesus.

He is the Door to the Sheepfold, but He is also the One waiting inside the door to welcome those who enter in by faith. He is the Way and also the Destination. He is the Truth and also the Subject which it explains. He is the Light and also the One who is illuminated. Christ is all!

When we begin our Christian journey, it is important that we fix and maintain a proper goal. It is easy to become so engrossed in the Word expressed in the Bible that we forget that the Bible is but a vehicle to bring us to Jesus who is also the Word of God but in a more literal sense.

We must not become so enamored with the vehicle that we forget the destination. The vehicle is a means to an end, and not the end itself. If we are to "apprehend" that for which we have ben apprehended, we must keep our eyes on Jesus. Maturity is "the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13).

To demonstrate that this is not some inane tangent or mean-

ingless exercise like "beating the air," permit me to focus your attention upon Galatians 4:19. "My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you. . . ." The Apostles of Jesus did not give priority to the Holy Trinity of "Budgets, Buildings and Baptisms." They focused their aim on the transformation of every Christian into the likeness of Jesus. It became such an obsession with Paul that His personal agony over their spiritual development was like the travail of a woman with child. The goal was "Christ in you, the hope of glory" and all else paled into significance.

The Scriptures make a direct association with our maturity in Christ and the growth of the Body. When we grow up into Him in all things, then we will experience every member ministering so that the Body will be able to build up itself in love (Eph. 4:15-16). The strength of a church is in direct proportion to its ability to be like Jesus.

He is the Alpha and the Omega. He is the A and the Z. "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy . . . for in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in Him . . ." (Col. 2:8-10).

Abba

The Hebrew word for father "ab." It occurs 1195 times in the O. T. Scriptures. Only 15 times is it used in a religious sense. It seems that the Hebrew people seldom thought of God as a Father.

In those passages which refer to God as a Father, He is only considered as the Father of the nation as a whole, as in Deuteronomy 32:6, or of the King of Israel as in I Chronicles 17:13. In O.T. times God was not considered the Father of an individual, or of mankind as a whole.

The Greek word for father is "pater." It is found in the New Testament Scriptures 402 times and 245 of these are used in a religious sense. Jesus not only considered God as His Father, but wanted us to do the same.

He taught His disciples to pray, "Our Father which art in Heaven. . . ." Realizing how difficult it would be for Jewish people to experience an intimate comradery with God, He encouraged them to remember their earthly fathers. We came to our earthly fathers in a fearless manner. We could ask for anything with the absolute assurance that our earthly fathers would not permit us to have something which would be detrimental to our welfare.

He then reminded us that if we, being evil, know how to give good things unto our children, how much more shall our Father which is in heaven give good things unto them that ask Him (Matt. 7:11).

But Jesus went one step further. He not only referred to God as His personal Father, but spoke of Him as "Abba" (Mark 14:36). This would be roughly equivalent to our English word "daddy."

Nowhere in the entire wealth of Hebrew Scriptures or of ancient devotional literature do we find a single reference to God being addressed as "Abba."

In the literature of Rabbinical Judaism we do find one reference in the Babylonian Talmud which dates about the first century B. C. Here some school children are quoted as praying "Dear father (Abba) give us rain."

Jesus, however, took the matter further yet. He not only prayed to God Himself as "Abba" but taught that we should do the same. As a matter of fact this is a specific part of the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Our transition from the life of a slave to the life of a son is so dramatic that we cannot accomplish it successfully on our own. It is therefore the work of the Holy Spirit to give testimony to the fact that we are children of God, not slaves, and to cry out on our behalf "Abba, Father" (Romans 8:15).

The same dramatic message is found in Galatians 4:6, ". . . And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts crying Abba, Father."

We would never dare to do such a thing on our own, but the Holy Spirit leaves us with no alternative. Not only does He impel us to think of God as our personal Father who shepherds us so meticulously that even the very hairs of our head are all numbered. He also emboldens us to communicate with God in the most endearing and intimate terms. We are to use the very kind of language which the trusting youngster uses when they fling their loving little arms around their daddy's neck.

Thank you, Jesus! Thank you, Jesus! We shall be eternally grateful that you have broken down the barriers that separated us from God and have sent your Spirit into our hearts that we might cry out, "Abba Father."

“Abba”

For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry Abba, Father (Rom. 8:15).

The manner by which Christian worship can be distinguished from Judaism is more obvious to me each time I read the Bible. The difference is as dramatic as the contrast between Isaac and Ishmael. To endeavor to mix the two would be like putting new wine into old skins, or attempting to sew a new piece of cloth into an old garment.

Typical of the chasm separating the two philosophies of religion was the propensity of the early church to pray to God as “Abba.” The word “abba” is a kind of baby talk. It is like saying “daddy.” It is a term of warm endearment totally inappropriate for use in an atmosphere of formalism. Christians, you see, had been delivered from the curse of formalism and the Holy Spirit gave to them the relationship of little children. This emboldened them to approach God with the same confidence that a little child has when he throws his arms about his father’s neck and cries out “abba” or “daddy.”

The devout Jew could never do this. The *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* offers this stunning quotation on page 614 of Vol. I, “Nowhere in the entire wealth of devotional literature produced by ancient Judaism do we find “abba” being used as a way of addressing God.”

To show how scrupulously they searched for such a reference they offer this quotation from the Babylonian Talmud as the closest thing to it. Little children had been clinging to the robes of their local rabbi and crying “abba give us rain, abba give us rain.” The Rabbi then responded with this prayer to God. “Sovereign of the world, do it for the sake of those who cannot distinguish between an ‘abba’ who can give rain and an ‘abba’ who can give no rain.”

Amidst the multiplied thousands of pages of Jewish devotional literature there is not one single reference to be found where a devout Jew ever used the term "abba" in a direct reference to God. Such a designation for Deity would be utterly out of character with Jewish worship . . . but it was both typical and appropriate for Christianity.

When Jesus prayed in Gethsemane He said: "abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt" (Mark 14:36).

The genius of Christianity enables those of us who have been the bondservants of sin to receive the very Spirit of Jesus. The same Spirit that prayed to God in Gethsemane dwells in our hearts by faith. We are no longer slaves to sin, but we are sons in the family. "And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father" (Gal. 4:6).

It is to be profoundly regretted that many in our day are almost as offended by if informal worship as those pious Jews of the First Century. They feel most comfortable in an atmosphere of formalism,. God is seen more as a Royal Monarch or Ruling Judge than He is as a Loving Father. For this reason their worship is pervaded by an atmosphere of sacred gloom. They march in with a somber expression and sit stiffly until the ordeal is over. There may be a few nervous chuckles if the minister tells a joke but generally speaking their gathering is much more like a session in court than a family reunion.

The early Christians did not indulge themselves in the luxury of special buildings erected for the specific purpose of worshipping Jesus. Their worship was of such a nature that they could meet effectively in someone's living room or by a riverside. In times of persecution they even met in the catacombs beneath the city of Rome. They did not meet as spectators in the bleachers but they gathered around a table as members of God's family. And the Holy Spirit enabled them to call Him, "Abba, Father."

Like an Acrobat

Our English word "acrobat" comes from a compound of two different Greek words. The first part of the word is "akros" which means "highest." It refers to the "topmost point" or "extremity." The second part of the word is from "bainein" which means "to go." An acrobat is therefore someone who goes high. They walk a tightrope high above the ground, or swing from a flying trapeze high above the admiring crowd below.

Needless to say an acrobat has to be careful. The higher you go the more careful you become. Just a few weeks ago I helped a neighbor put a piece of tin on a roof some 25 feet off the ground. The higher I went on the ladder, the more diligent and careful I became.

It is most interesting to observe that this is the very word chosen by the Holy Spirit to describe the way that Christians are to walk. "See then that ye walk CIRCUMSPECTLY, not as fools, but as wise . . ." (Eph. 5:15). The Greek word translated "circumspectly" is "akribos" which is basically our word for "acrobat." It is translated in the King James Version as "diligently, perfectly, and circumspectly." Other versions use "accurately" and "carefully," but the idea is still the same. The man on a tight rope cannot be nonchalant about the way he walks and survive. This is precisely the illustration used by the Holy Spirit to show how that we as Christians are to conduct our lives. We are to be as accurate and careful about what we do as an acrobat.

The Christian is like a soldier in combat, an athlete in competition, a pilgrim in a strange land, or a voyager on a stormy sea. Time after time the Scriptures probe our thinking and stir our intellect with the necessity of extreme diligence and utmost care. We are not to be like someone beating the air" but with genuine effort we are to be deliberate about every move we

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make lest after preaching to others we should find ourselves rejected.

Not too many are acrobats in the literal sense of the word, but virtually everyone of us has had an experience in a high place which has tested our abilities and concentration. As children it might have been a jungle gym, a slide, or climbing a tree. As adults we sometimes find ourselves in situations which are more demanding. Though it has been many years ago, I still have vivid recollections of working on a water tower in Sand Springs, Oklahoma 85 feet above the ground. I was not really an acrobat but I tried to be as careful as one.

Today I seem to have an easy schedule. There are no major crises which I know of that I will have to face. It is a "regular" day. The temptation, therefore, is to grow careless about today. To become so utterly nonchalant and apathetic that I become easy prey for the devil.

The Scriptures also admonish, us that when we think we stand, we had better take heed lest we fall. There are an incredible number of ways that the unscrupulous enemy of our souls can trip us up. He has traps and tricks so utterly clever that we can never avoid them without divine assistance. Down through the years he has hung some famous scalps on the walls of his wigwam and he is now in the process of making a determined effort to capture yours and mine.

This is at least one good reason why we need to walk today "like an acrobat" . . . not as fools, but as wise . . . redeeming the time because the days are evil.

Ask

“Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that *asketh* receiveth; and he that *seeketh* findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?”

“Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall *ask*, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 18:19).

“And all things, whatsoever ye shall *ask* in prayer, believing, ye shall receive” (Matt. 21:22).

“And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For everyone that *asketh* receiveth; and he that *seeketh* findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him” (Luke 11:9-13)?

“And whatsoever ye shall *ask* in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall *ask* anything in my name I will do it” (John 14:13-14).

“If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall *ask* what ye will, and it shall be done unto you” (John 15:7).

“. . . whatsoever ye shall *ask* of the Father in my name, he may give it you” (John 15:16).

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall *ask* the

ASK

Father in my name he will give it you. Hitherto have ye *asked* nothing in my name: *ask* and ye shall receive that your joy may be full" (John 16:23-24).

"Now unto him who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we *ask* or think . . ." (Eph. 3:20).

"If any of you lack wisdom, let him *ask* of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him *ask* in faith, nothing wavering" (James 1:5-6).

". . . ye have not, because ye *ask* not. Ye *ask*, and receive not, because ye *ask* amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts" (James 4:2-3).

"And whatsoever we *ask* we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight" (I John. 3:22).

"And this is the confidence that we have in him, that if we *ask* anything according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we *ask*, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him . . ." (I John 5:14-15).

"ASK."

Brephos

"... from a *child* thou hast know the holy scriptures . . ." (II Tim. 3:15).

The versatile Greek language provides us with at least six different words which are all translated as "child" in the authorized version of the English Bible. They are: *huios*, *teknon*, *pais*, *paidion*, *nepios* and *Brephos*.

The word "brephos" is defined by Thayer as (1) an unborn child, embryo, fetus; (2) a newborn child, infant, babe, It is used eight times in the New Testament scriptures.

Luke 1:41 "... the *babe* leaped in her womb. . . ."

Luke 1:44 "... the *babe* leaped in my womb for joy. . . ."

Luke 2:12 "... ye shall find the *babe* wrapped in swaddling clothes. . . ."

Luke 2:16 "... they came with haste and found . . . the *babe* lying in a manger"

Luke 18:15 "... and they brought unto him *infants* that he would touch them"

Acts 7:19 "... they cast out their *young children* to the end that they might not live"

I Pet. 2:2 "... as *newborn babes* desire the sincere milk of the word . . ."

II Tim. 3:15 "... from a *child* thou hast known the holy scriptures . . ."

Note that each usage of the word "brephos" is in harmony with the definition given us by Thayer. It refers either to an unborn fetus like John the Baptist or to an infant in the earliest moments of his life as illustrated by Jesus wrapped in swaddling clothes.

Now let us apply this meaning to the passage in II Timothy 3:15. Timothy knew the scriptures from the time he was an unborn fetus or an infant in the first moments of his earthly life.

His father was a Greek, and we have no accurate way of determining his relationship with Jehovah. The fact that the infant Timothy was not circumcised may imply that his father was not sympathetic to the Jewish faith. But somehow Timothy was given a constant exposure to the word of God from the earliest moments of his life.

When Paul reflected upon the unfeigned faith of Timothy, he associated it with the same type of faith which dwelt first of all in his grandmother Lois, and then in his mother Eunice. How beautiful.

How easy to envision a young expectant mother praying with her face toward Jerusalem, reading aloud the Scriptures with her pious mother. The birth of a son only served to enrich the deep bonds of religious conviction around which her life revolved, and perhaps the first words to reach the ears of her newborn infant were words of prayer and praise to Jehovah. Can you not see in your mind's eye an elated grandmother chanting a psalm of exultation, and a smiling mother muttering a prayer of gratitude as she held her "brephos" to her bosom. It was this type of an environment that shaped and molded the life of young Timothy. From the time he was a "brephos" he knew the holy scriptures which were able to make him wise unto salvation. The faith of his godly mother and grandmother provided a beautiful vignette to enrich the first page of his life and to enhance and enrich his every experience thereafter.

What a dramatic contrast this is with the experience of many children in our own generation. Their first knowledge of God comes as they are thrust into Sunday School where a total stranger takes up the belated task which should have commenced at the moment of birth. Their initiation to the world of spiritual things is better late than never, but it places the youngster at a decided disadvantage. Concepts of God need not come abruptly or confuse a childish mind, they can be woven into the fabric of human existence from the moment of conception. The Christian mother is a vessel undefiled by debilitating drugs. No harsh nar-

cotics and addictive toxins will find their way into the bloodstream of her unborn child. She is a temple of the Holy Spirit and has been bought with a price, and the child in her womb is a beneficiary of her lifestyle and conduct. He, like Timothy, need not learn of God from strangers. He can assimilate something of that divine existence from the first sensations he is able to distinguish. Just as the house upon the rock was many days in completion, the formation of a Christian faith may be a long way off from the foundation laid in infancy, but when the rains descend and the winds blow, we will be eternally grateful that our children learned from a child the holy scriptures which made them wise unto salvation.

Avoiding a Catastrophe

"Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the SUBVERTING of the hearers" (II Tim. 2:14).

The Greek word translated as "subverting" in the text before us is "katastrophe." It comes from "kata" which means "down," and "strophe," which means "a turning." Timothy is being given instructions on how to avoid a catastrophe.

The only other time the word is used in the N. T. Scriptures is in II Peter 2:6. Here it is translated as "overthrow." In this verse it has reference to the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah which God turned into ashes with a "catastrophe" of colossal proportions.

In my younger days I took special pleasure in religious arguments. In retrospect, I probably did not do a great deal of damage to the people with whom I was arguing. I presume that many of them were as mixed up as I was. I do have agony in my heart, however, for those innocent bystanders who may have suffered spiritually because of my intemperance. I fear that for many of them it was a "catastrophe." How tragic that unsaved people are sometimes lost in the shuffle as religious bigots display their egos and their ignorance.

The Pastoral Letters are literally filled with practical advice for avoiding catastrophes. One passage, in particular, is found in the chapter before us.

Verse 23 - Timothy was to avoid foolish and unlearned questions, because they would create strife.

Verse 24 - The servant of the Lord must not strive, but he must be gentle unto all. He must also be capable and patient.

Verse 25 - When the servant of the Lord instructs argumentative people, he must do so with such a teachable attitude that confused individuals will not be backed into a corner with some

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erroneous position to defend. God may change their minds even if we can't.

Verse 26 – Up to now these people have been under the dominion of the Devil but this strategy will enable them to escape.

The use of the word “subverting” or “catastrophe” in this context, has particular reference to the use of the tongue. James informs us that the “tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity . . .” and in the same passage reminds us “how great a matter a little fire kindleth . . .” (see James 3).

The Great Chicago fire was supposed to have been caused by a modest little lantern which was kicked over by an unruly cow. What a catastrophe!

Today the Christian world has also seen its share of catastrophes. Not only do we have literally hundreds of disputing denominations, but also a wide variety of sectarian debates within the individual denominations themselves. At some point in time we need to stop such fires before they start.

This advice is not heresy or optional, but a direct command of Scripture which we are “charged before the Lord” to obey. Let us obey this command and avoid catastrophes in the Family of God!

The Bush and the Tree

Jeremiah 17:5-9 compares philosophies of life to two different types of vegetation. Those who trust in men and make flesh their arm are compared to a "heath in the desert." This dry little bush inhabits the parched wilderness and is a pitiful symbol.

Those who trust in the Lord are much different. They are like a "tree planted by the water." The tree by the river bank is lush and green regardless of the changing weather patterns.

It is obviously a wise decision to trust in the Lord.

The Greek language has two different words which are translated as "despair." The first is "exaporeo" which literally means "out of a way through." The last part of the word corresponds to our English word "porous." Those who trust in men inevitably come to despair. They arrive at a situation and humanly speaking there is "no way through it." This is the essence of despair.

The second Greek word for "despair" is "apelpizo." This word literally means "away from hope." Again those who trust in men find hope in only certain circumstances. Man can consistently remedy many illnesses and correct a wide variety of problems. Humanity, however, does have its limits. Ultimately those who trust in man will arrive at a place "away from hope" and this again is what "despair" is all about.

The late Jim Rutherford, Sr. used to tell about the dear Christian lady who was dying of cancer. As her family gathered about her with tears in their eyes she sparkled and said, "Please don't weep for me . . . this is the moment I've been waiting for!" She was like a tree with deep roots in the Water of Life.

When Moses came to the Red Sea with more than two million refugees there was "a way through." No, it was not through human might and the military strength of men. . . . Moses trusted in the Lord and left us a legacy with beautiful blossoms that never wither and fade. He was like a tree planted

by the rivers of water.

The green trees of history have left us a legacy of courage and hope. Through faith they have "subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of aliens . . ." (Heb. 11:33-34). These were not shriveled up little bushes dying in the parched and arid wilderness, they were living and fruitful sentinels who help us chart a course to the River of Life. They stand strong and tall as perennial reminders of how beautiful it is to trust in God. They are now heroes in heaven of whom the world was not worthy.

But let us turn our gaze inward and seek to analyze the source of our own confidence. Jeremiah warns us that the heart is "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. . . ." How easy it is for us to face one way and walk another and honor with our lips what we deny in our life.

The river bank is narrow indeed by comparison with the broad wilderness. Trusting in men is so utterly convenient. It enables us to immediately put down our roots with little or no thought of the rigors and disciplines of the Christian life. Those who trust in men, however, will only bequeath to the world a little dried up bush which is fit for the fire.

May God grant you the courage and faith to be like a tree planted by the rivers of water.

Christians

“. . . and the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch”

The name “Christian” has been an honored name for almost two thousand years. Isaiah predicted that God’s people would be called by a “new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name” (Isa. 62:2). James spoke of the “worthy name” by which the followers of Jesus were known (James 2:7). No doubt, it was the name “Christian.” Peter wrote: “But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evil doer, or as a busybody in other men’s matters, Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God in this name” (I Peter 4:15-16).

This “worthy name,” however, was not given first in Jerusalem where the church began, but it was given first in Antioch. Inquiring minds will want to know “why”?

The answer, in all probability, is that the church in Antioch was the first congregation in the world to accept Gentiles (Acts 11:20). News of this came to Jerusalem and they sent Barnabas to check out the story (v. 22). Barnabas was so excited that he went to Tarsus and got Saul. These men assembled themselves with the church and taught much people, and the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch (v. 26).

Jesus commissioned His disciples to preach the Gospel to all “nations” (Matt. 28:19-20). The word translated as “nations” is the Greek word “ethnos,” from which we get our English word “ethnic.” It is the normal word for “gentile” in the Greek language. Jesus specifically commissioned His disciples to preach to all the ethnic groups of the world. They, however, did not understand their commission.

The church in Jerusalem was composed exclusively of Jews. The process of accepting Gentiles came gradually over a period of many years. Acts 8 tells us that Philip went down to Samaria

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and preached. The Samaritans were half-breed Jews. Next we read in Acts 10 that Peter preached to a Gentile Centurian named Cornelius. He was a devout, God-fearing man, but Peter still did not accept the invitation to preach to him without a certain amount of spiritual coercion.

Finally we come to Acts 11 where the Holy Spirit with a free flow of influence inspired some anonymous disciples to make history by doing precisely what Jesus had commanded all of his followers to do.

The Scriptures teach that "whosoever" believes in Jesus will have everlasting life. As a matter of fact there are a whole series of "whosoever" in the Bible. God is no respecter of persons . . . "whosoever" can come to Jesus and He will in no wise cast him out.

God's people are never more like Jesus than when we display an absence of prejudice and discrimination. The world is filled with barriers which divide. Mankind is divided racially, socially, religiously, politically, educationally, economically, and in other ways too numerous to mention. In Jesus all of these barriers are broken down and we become "one"!

It is altogether possible that when you reach out to all segments of society in the name of Jesus, someone will hate you in the same way that they hated Him. But if any one suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this name!

Looking for a City

For he looked for a city which hath foundations . . . (Heb. 11:10).

There is an old joke: "Why is a hippopotamus, called a hippopotamus?" Answer: "Because it looks more like a hippopotamus than it does anything else."

The joke is not quite so funny for those familiar with the Greek language. The word "hippopotamus" literally means "river-horse." "Hippo" is their word for "horse," and "potamus" for "river."

The point is that there is quite frequently a rational explanation for many words which are utilized in human language. The word "city" is an interesting case in point.

The first use of the word city in the Bible is found in Genesis 4:17. In this passage we are informed that Cain builded a city and named it after his son Enoch.

The Hebrew word for "city" is "aw-yar." It comes from the root "oor" which means to "open the eyes." Hence Strong in his *Exhaustive Concordance* defines city as "a place guarded by waking or watch."

A "city" would therefore be of special significance to Cain. His desire to dominate his younger brother had caused him to commit the world's first murder. As a part of his punishment God consigned him to a two-fold curse. (1) When thou tillest the ground it shall not henceforth yield unto thee of her strength. (2) A fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth (Gen. 4:12).

Cain felt crushed! He said that his punishment was greater than he could bear. He believed that everyone who found him would slay him.

God responded by placing a mark upon Cain lest any finding him should slay him (Gen. 4:15).

It was at this point that Cain founded a city!

It seems to me that his motive in doing so was less than honorable. God had condemned him to the life of a wandering vagabond, yet still promised to protect him from the vengeance of his fellow men. By building a city Cain testified to the world that he did not accept the life of a vagabond or the protection of God. It was a testimony to his insecurity and possibly even rebellion.

There is also in this equation the latent element of control. It seems that Cain wanted to dominate his brother. Perhaps he wanted to dominate and control others as well. By building a city it would stand to reason that he would be its ruler. Thus the city would keep him from being a vagabond, provide him protection, and also give him subjects over which he could rule.

The actions of Cain are in stark contrast with those of Abraham. The book of Hebrews testifies that Abraham dwelt in tents while looking for a city whose builder and maker was God. Abraham willingly abandoned the security of city life in Chaldea and became a vagabond for God. He deliberately chose to leave the towering walls of men and the protecting armies of human flesh that he might pioneer the pathway of faith. He proved that God was faithful to perform what he had promised.

When John the Apostle was imprisoned on the Isle of Patmos God opened the heavens and permitted him to see a Holy City. Its gates were of pearls and its streets were made of pure gold. That city had no need of the sun or the moon for it was illuminated by the glory of God and the light of the Lamb. Its gates would never be shut, and nothing that worketh abomination or maketh a lie shall be privileged to enter in.

The Clean Crib . . .

"Where no oxen are the crib is clean . . ." (Prov. 14:4)

The Hebrew word for "crib" is "ebuwc." It comes from the root word "abac" which is found only twice in the Scriptures: Proverbs 15:17 where it is translated as "stalled" ox, and I Kings 4:23 where it is rendered "fatted" fowl.

It does not take much imagination to know what a stall is like where an ox has been fattened. Farmers with a feed lot do not even need to use their imagination. The more cattle in the feed lot . . . the deeper the manure . . . only an empty stable stays clean.

This little proverb has been of pivotal importance in my perspective of the church. That which aggravates and annoys many people may prove to be the very thing which excites me the most.

It's like the housewife who loved to do dishes. The more dishes she had to wash the better she liked it. When asked why she responded that every dirty dish was a blessed reminder that her family had something to eat. There are millions of people today who would be happy to have dirty dishes to wash . . . but they do not.

Where no oxen are the crib is clean. The farmer with no manure to shovel is to be pitied. His stables are empty.

Quite frequently our meetings here at the church building are interrupted by the sounds of little children. These sounds are like music to my ears for it reminds me of precious parents who are seeking to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. It is an encouragement for today as well as a wonderful harbinger for the strong church of tomorrow.

I spoke to a minister recently who told me that there is not one young child in the entire church which he is serving. When

THE CLEAN CRIB

that church was approached about starting a nursery as an encouragement to young couples there did not seem to be any interest. Nurseries are a lot of trouble . . . and so are little children. Empty churches stay clean just like empty stables.

The last part of the proverb is positive. "Where no oxen are, the crib is clean; but much increase is by the strength of the ox."

The man with no oxen does not have an abundant harvest. What little plowing he is able to do by hand is utterly insignificant by comparison to the work which oxen can do. The ox, as troublesome as he may be, is an expedient to "much increase."

The churches which have much increase are the ones who are willing to clean out the crib. They will carpet the nursery and pave the parking lot. They will train the teachers and show special interest to visitors. They will invest whatever time, energy, and money it takes to minister to the needs of people and the community.

Churches that are stagnant and dying don't want to be bothered with the mess of oxen in the crib. Week after week there is that reassuring sameness which assures them that nothing is happening. The facilities are perhaps a bit dusty, but otherwise in excellent repair. Nothing ever gets marked on or broken, trampled or abused, stopped up or worn out. The empty stable stays in excellent repair . . . no broken boards . . . no nails kicked out . . . nothing to shovel on the garden to make it grow . . . but regrettably not much of a harvest either.

Solomon stated it succinctly, "Where no oxen are, the crib is clean; but much increase is by the strength of the ox."

Confusion???

*“ . . . God is not the author of confusion, but of peace”
(I Cor. 14:33).*

The congregation at Corinth had a great deal of confusion. They had so many problems that a lot of preachers would hesitate to even write to them for fear of guilt by association. Here is a short resume of some of their troubles as they are reflected in the first Corinthian letter.

They were divided over human leaders (ch. 1-4); they had tolerated a type of immorality that was even repugnant to the Gentiles (ch. 5); they had taken their brethren to court before unbelievers (ch.6); they had problems over marriage (ch. 7); idolatry (ch. 8-10); communion (ch. 11); spiritual gifts (ch. 12-14) and the resurrection (ch. 15). Their public worship had degenerated to the place that it did more harm than good (Cor. 11:17). In seeking a solution to these serious problems in the church, Paul reminds them that God is not the author of confusion. *Whenever confusion arises in a congregation it is important to remember that God is not responsible for it.*

The word translated “confusion” is the Greek word AKATASTASIA. It means a state of disorder or instability. Vine, in his *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* associated the word with “revolution or anarchy” (p. 227). God is not the author of anarchy. Every aspect of creation and revelation is indicative of order and symmetry. From the smallest snowflake to the largest galaxy, creation reflects a super human precision of arrangement and design. God is not the author of confusion.

The Garden of Eden is but one small reflection of the nature of Jehovah. Every beast of the earth and every fowl of the air was given every green herb for food. The perfect Designer had devised a system that rendered death and bloodshed unneces-

CONFUSION???

sary. The wolf could dwell with the lamb and the leopard could lie down with the kid. Every creature could roam the garden without fear. "God saw everything that he had made, and behold it was very good." The garden was a model of peace, order and tranquility. God is the author of peace.

The word for "peace" in I Corinthians 14:33 is the Greek word *EIRENE*. This word is used in the Bible to denote harmonious relationships between both men and nations. It means friendliness and freedom from molestation. It refers to the very order and harmony that existed in Eden. God created Eden a model of perfect peace. God is not the author of confusion. When all of nature was turned into a snarling jungle, God was not responsible for it. God does not create confusion anywhere. In a society that is threatened with anarchy it is expedient that we get this straight in our minds. The confusion in our streets and on our campuses was not created by God. He does not create confusion in any home or any church. God is the author of peace. And when the time comes that all men submit to the reign of heaven they will beat their swords into plow shares and their spears into pruning hooks and study war no more.

Confusion and Peace

“ . . . God is not the author of confusion, but of peace . . . ”
(I Cor. 14:33).

It is relatively easy to fill in that which is missing in an orderly system. 1, 2, 3, _, 5, 6, etc. or 1, 4, 7, 10, _, etc.

To speak of a “disorderly system” is to use words that are contradictory. The word “system” literally means “to set together” and implies cohesiveness and harmony. Disorder is a disruption of the system. It is a monkey wrench in the gears, or a scrabbling of order which makes it impossible to predict anything but failure.

When Paul was informed of “confusion” in the church at Corinth he was constrained to remind them that our God is not the Author of “confusion.” The Greek word is *akatastasia* which refers to disorder and instability.

God is not the Author of confusion. He is the God of peace. Everything which He created was “systematic” and “harmonious.” Eden, for example, was a paradise without bloodshed or fear for even the animals initially ate only vegetation (Gen. 1:30).

In the midst of the garden, however, was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

The word “evil” is the Hebrew word “*ra*.” It comes from a root which literally means to “break into pieces.” If man partook of this tree the orderly system of God would be fragmented. Paradise would slip through his fingers and his world would become a snarling jungle of bloodshed and destruction.

Once we understand the nature of God and the nature of evil it is easy to understand why God has ordained civil government (Rom. 13). Anarchy is diametrically opposed to the very nature of God.

Human governments, however, have a tendency to create

CONFUSION AND PEACE

local harmony and international tension. Consequently we live in a world that is filled with wars and rumors of wars.

God's solution to the fragmentation of earth is a new kind of government. It is a kingdom which is not of this world. It crowns Christ as King and includes people from every nation, race, kindred, and tongue.

Those who swear allegiance to the kingdom of heaven are "peacemakers" and not "piecemakers." They are soldiers engaged in a war of ideologies endeavoring to bring every thought into captivity to Christ.

In the wake of their conquest the home becomes a scene of tranquility. Each member of the family becomes so submissive and sensitive to the needs of others that love and harmony abound.

When these ambassadors of peace conquer a community the slaves and masters are sitting around a common table sharing a feast of love.

When Jesus is Lord men learn to beat their swords into plowshares and study war no more.

We know men by their fruits. You do not gather grapes of thorns or figs of thistles.

May God hasten the day when every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

“And be Content with your wages”

Luke 3:14

Those who are determined to live the “Jesus” kind of life will invariably find themselves out of step with society. The sandaled carpenter left us an example that we should follow in His steps. He demonstrated that it is possible to obtain our daily bread without avarice and greed. His aim in life was to accomplish the will of God . . . thus he was free from the canker of covetousness and also from riches, deceitful thickets which choke out the good seed so that it becomes unfruitful.

The scriptural admonition “. . . and be content with your wages” came from one who was preparing the way for the Lord. The soldiers demanded of him, “And what shall we do?” The inspired advice of John the Baptist was threefold:

- (1) *Do violence to no man*, that is, do not take advantage of your positions to extort from the public.
- (2) *Neither accuse any falsely*. The word employed here is “sukophanteo” from “sukon” (a fig) and “phaino” (to show). Originally it denoted they who exposed those who were involved in the unlawful export of figs. It is always used in a bad sense and thus refers to a cringing and malignant informer who made his accusations from the love of gain.
- (3) . . . *and be content with your wages*. The word translated “wages” is “opsonion” from “opson” (meat) and “oneomai” (to buy). It is translated as “wages” in Luke 3:14, Romans 6:23 and II Corinthians 11:8, but its derivation indicates that it includes not only money, but daily provisions for the sustenance of life.

This triad of closely related ideas is in perfect harmony with

"AND BE CONTENT WITH YOUR WAGES"

the teaching of Christ and His apostles but probably would not be compatible with the lectures delivered to the local labor unions.

Sid Allsbury said to me some time ago that a survey indicated that Americans in every income bracket need one-third more in order to satisfactorily meet their obligations. If they were making about \$100 per week they needed about \$130. If they were making \$1,000 per week they needed about \$1,300. Feeling the uncomfortable pinch of inflation and faced with unanticipated expenses we send our representatives to the bargaining table with demands for more. Yet, when we get more we are still not satisfied. Everyone needs "enough" to get by on . . . but how much is "enough"? Regardless of how much we make, "enough" seems to be "about one-third more."

Paul wrote,

I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, there with to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengthened me (Phil. 4:11-13).

John the Baptist was sent to prepare men to receive the Kingdom of Heaven. When we view his words in the light of this divine truth it illuminates our need to depart from carnality's debilitating treadmill and learn to live within our income. Contentment is a state of mind . . . not a state of events. The man who is interested in the Kingdom must rise above the earthly standards of those about him. Contrary to the unwritten creed of our day "a man's life does not consist in the abundance of things which he possesseth." "Man," the Savior would remind us, "does not live by bread alone."

We, too, can do "all things" through the power of the same glorified Savior . . . being "content with our wages" might be a good place to start.

Constrained

We are living in an age of pressure and constraint. Some pressures are social, some are financial, some are political, some are physical but these pressures are very real and they play an important role in shaping and directing our lives.

A good deal of the pressure which we face is objectionable. Consider for example, the turmoil in our Southern states. The long arm of the Federal Government has pulled the intergration lever and the squeeze is being felt . . . but strongly resented. Businesses frequently succumb beneath the grinding wheels of mergers and conglomerates, and the lower echelon of executives dance like puppets in response to financial strings. The same type of resentment is often triggered on the personal level. We often go, say, and do things because of social blackmail – not because we want to.

The Kingdom of our blessed Savior presents a refreshing contrast to the conniving and skulduggery of the carnal. The only pressure Jesus ever put on anyone came from the constraining power of love. Listeners were free to come and to go at will. When the multitudes withdrew He asked His disciples, "Will ye also go away?" Those who sought to follow Him were reminded that even though the birds and foxes had dwellings . . . He did not. When Judas arose from the table to consummate his bargain for 30 pieces of silver the Savior simply remarked, "What thou doest, do quickly." Peter drew his sword and slashed at Malchus . . . Jesus healed His wounded enemy and told Peter to put away his sword.

In describing that long night of torture Luke remarks, "And the men that held Jesus mocked Him, and smote Him" (Luke 22:63. The word translated "held" is the Greek word "sunecho" which means "to hold fast" or "constrain." It is interesting, and perhaps significant to note that this is the very word used by Paul to describe the way that he was "held fast" or

CONSTRAINED

"constrained" by the love of Jesus. He wrote, "For the love of Christ constraineth us . . ." (II Cor. 5:14). Those who have been captured by the magnetic love of Jesus can understand and appreciate the accuracy of these words. We are free to live any way we choose, but we are constrained by an inward compulsion to choose the way that He lived.

At first we are tempted to despise the toothless regime which the sandaled Carpenter began in Jerusalem those many centuries ago. But with a little reflection we concur with Napoleon who is reported to have said, "Alexander the Great, Charlamagne, Julius Caesar, myself _ all founded kingdoms upon force. Those kingdoms have crumbled into dust. Jesus Christ built His Kingdom on love, and today millions would die for Him." The genius of the Christian institution has survived the flames of persecution and the erosion of the centuries. His love will never lose its power to constrain His followers to sacrifice and service.

The longer I meditate upon the beauty and wonder of the wisdom of Heaven the more disgusted I grow with the gimmicks and contraptions which men devise to prop up the rotten timbers of the institutional church. I find it difficult to conceive of Jesus sponsoring a contest in order to whip up a little enthusiasm among His disciples. No trinkets were dangled as prizes to those who would put forth a little effort. The invitation involved a cross and Demas, or anyone else was free to go over the hill anytime he wanted to. All those who love Him will keep His commandments, and those who do not love Him are resigned to "Anathema Maranatha." When the ecclesiastical machinery of our generation has rusted to a grinding halt and when the seasonal schemes of religious promotion have blossomed and withered - the love of Jesus Christ will still be constraining to evangelism and martyrdom. AMEN.

Corrupt Communication

Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying . . . (Eph. 4:29).

A word cannot be accurately defined without considering the context in which it is used. If I say, "Quit being so IRRESPONSIBLE and start paying your bills" I am partially defining the word by the way that I use it. I could just as easily say, "Quit being so IRRESPONSIBLE and shut up," or "Quit being so IRRESPONSIBLE and start letting people know how you feel."

Thus the word "corrupt" is partially defined by the very text in which it occurs. It is used in opposition to "edifying." We are not to let "corrupt" communications proceed out of our mouth, but rather we are to speak in such a way that we can "edify" our brethren.

Both of these words are picturesque and meaningful. The word "corrupt" is from the Greek word "sepo" and means to become rotten. It is from the root which signifies to rot off or drop in pieces. The word for "edify" comes from the Greek word "oikodome." This is a compound of two words. Oikos means house, and dome means to build.

We are to speak in such a way that we will not cause members of His body to drop off and fall away, but rather that they will be built firmly into the house of the living God.

In this context, "corrupt communication" takes on a new significance. It may not be vulgarity or profanity at all. It does not have to include risque jokes and suggestive stories. Corrupt communication is anything which does not build up our brethren in the most holy faith.

Corrupt communication might well be the unvarnished truth. Suppose, for example, that some leader in the church is involved in a sin or indiscretion which is not public knowledge. I do not choose to go to him with the problem, but instead I tell

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the sordid matter to some new Christian. Should this information cause that Christian to fall away the communication has been rotten to the core, no matter how true it is. Corrupt communication is anything which does not build up, but rather tends to make someone fall away.

Perhaps this is one reason why the Scriptures teach us to be "slow to speak" (James 1:19). Before we pop the clutch on our tongue we need to have shifted our minds into a spiritual gear. Before we say anything to anybody it would be well for us to prayerfully consider how our words will benefit the kingdom. Are we house builders whose words are carefully chosen to enhance and edify those to whom we speak, or do we carelessly poison our brethren with words which will deteriorate their dedication to Christ or reduce their relationship with the church?

I deal with people almost daily who once were interested and active in the work of the kingdom, but who have since fallen away. The infection which rots away may begin with a sour word or negative disposition. Grumbling and contention are said to eat like gangrene in the body of Jesus and they are totally out of character for those who are housebuilders desiring to edify. A negative report from the ten spies corrupted a nation. Caleb and Joshua prove that it would have been possible to be positive.

Let us determine to let no corrupt communication proceed out of our mouths, but rather that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace to the hearer.

The Covenants

Alexander Campbell in *The Christian System* lists eight covenants mentioned in the Bible.

1. The Covenant with Adam - Hosea 6:7.
2. The covenant with Noah - Jeremiah 53:20, Gen. 9:9.
3. The Covenant with Abraham - Genesis 12:1-3, Galatians 3:17.
4. The Covenant of Circumcision - Acts 7:8
5. The Ten Commandments - Deuteronomy 4:11-13, 5:1-3, etc.
6. The Covenant of Peace - Exodus 40:13-15; Numbers 25:12-13.
7. The covenant with David - II Samuel 7:12-17, Jeremiah 33:20-21.
8. The New Covenant - Hebrews 8:8-13.

He further notes that commands, promises, appointments and ordinances are equally called "covenants" and that every covenant mentioned in the Bible originated with God not man.

The Ten Commandments are of particular interest to us for they are designated as a schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ that we might be justified by faith. The many analogies between the nation of Israel and the church of Jesus Christ are so obvious that we need not expatiate upon them in any great detail. See Hebrews 2, 3, I Corinthians 10, etc. Suffice it to say that just as Jehovah bound a multitude of redeemed slaves into a united community directed from Heaven through the Ten Commandments and a mediator named Moses, in a similar fashion. He has also bound together a multitude of redeemed sinners into a united community through His New Covenant and a mediator named Jesus. Christ is the head of His body, the church.

But let me direct myself to the common misconception that the first 39 books of our Bible are the Old Testament and the

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last 27 books are the New Testament. There is no doubt that when the Scriptures refer to the "Old Testament" they refer only to the Ten Commandment. As proof of this I offer the following:

1. The Scriptures explicitly teach that Moses received a covenant while he was 40 days upon Mount Sinai; the covenant was written upon two tablets of stone; the covenant was called "The Ten Commandments," and once the covenant was completed God added no more to it. See Exodus 24: 27-28; Deuteronomy 4:11-13; 5:1-3; 22: 9;11; etc. The canon of Hebrew Scriptures is never called a covenant.

2. The receptacle where the Ten commandments were kept was called "The Ark of the Covenant" (Num. 10:33). The ark disappeared before some books of prophecy were even written.

3 The covenant was made in Horeb (Deut. 5:2) or Mt. Sinai in Arabia (Gal. 4:25), but the Hebrew Scriptures were written in Palestine, Babylon and Persia.

4. The covenant was made when God took His children by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt (Heb. 8), but hardly any of the Scriptures were written at this time.

5. The covenant was broken by the time Jeremiah wrote Jeremiah 31, but many books of the Hebrew Bible were not written at this time.

In similar fashion the New Testament or New Covenant is not the 27 books usually so designated.

1. The New Covenant was a reality before any books of the Greek scriptures were written (Acts 2).

2. The New Covenant consists of putting the laws of God on people's hearts and minds - not on paper or tablets of stone (Heb. 8:10, II Cor. 3:3).

3. The Scriptures came gradually as a result of inspired men being guided into all truth (John 16:13), but the New Covenant was a complete reality from the very first convert to Christianity.

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The fact that John had not yet received the visions which he incorporated into the book of Revelation did not affect the covenant which God had already made with His people at Pentecost and which was referred to in II Corinthians 3, Hebrews 8 and other parts of the Christian Scriptures.

Legal documents such as the Ten Commandments or the Constitution must be interpreted. An inspired Moses did it for the nation of Israel, and the Supreme Court does it for the U.S.A. The New Covenant which God has made with man transcends such technicalities in the same way that Isaac transcended Ishmael. The things that are impossible with men are possible with God.

Cunning or Plain

. . . and Esau was a cunning hunter . . . and Jacob was a plain man . . . (Gen. 25:27)

Please forgive my propensity for generalizations but I am intrigued by the contrast which the Scriptures make between Esau and Jacob. Esau was a "cunning" hunter and a man of the field, and Jacob was a "plain" man who dwelt in tents.

It is with some reluctance that I make reference to Hebrew words and their translation. I am not a Hebrew scholar and I have such a high regard for the Scriptures that I certainly do not want to "read into" the text ideas which did not originate with God. This is why I refer to these thoughts as "generalizations." Having offered these words of caution let us look more closely at Genesis 25:27.

The Hebrew word translated as "cunning" is "yaw-dah" which comes from the primary root "to know." It is used 944 times in the Scriptures and expresses a multitude of shades of knowledge. I think it is fair, however, to say that Esau was noted for being "knowledgeable."

Jacob, by contrast, was a "plain" man. This is the Hebrew word "tawn" which is defined by Strong as "complete" or "pious." In the K.J.V. it is translated nine times as "perfect," twice as "undefiled," once as "upright" and once as plain.

Thus, it seems that one brother was noted for his "knowledge" and other for his "piety."

For those familiar with the deceptive actions of Jacob it may seem incongruous to find him described in such a complimentary way. We must remind you, however, that this analysis from the Scriptures is inspired. Permit me to pursue the story a bit further.

Esau "despised his birthright" but sought diligently for his father's "blessing." The writer of Hebrews seems to express

amazement that Esau would sell his birthright for "one morsel of meat" (Heb. 12:16). Yet, the very next verse indicates that he sought his father's blessing "carefully with tears."

Perhaps by distinguishing between the birthright and the blessing we can more readily appreciate the analysis of Esau given to us by God. One principle feature of the birthright was the privilege of mediating at the family altar. In the age of the Patriarchs the oldest male member of the family ministered as a priest. This apparently did not interest Esau. Hebrews 12:16 describes him as a "fornicator" and "profane." He was noted for his knowledge and not his piety!

The blessing, by contrast, involved physical prosperity. The blessing which Esau craved and Jacob received is described in Genesis 27:28-29. It involved the "dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine." Nations would bow down to him, people would serve him, and in particular, his brother would be subject unto him.

It seems that Esau despised his birthright and sought after the blessing, and Jacob sought after the birthright and despised the blessing. Jacob only received the blessing at the insistence of his mother, but he sought the birthright on his own.

Someday we shall all stand before the Judgement Seat of Christ. At that time we shall be separated as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. On the one hand will be those who, like Esau, craved only the treasures of earth. On the other hand will be those like Jacob who sought to be pious. Let us strive to be "plain" and not "cunning"!

Death

Sometime ago a woman who was over one hundred years old was asked the secret of her longevity. She replied, "Just keep breathing, brother, just keep breathing."

This simple formula is instinctively a part of everyone. Yet we must admit, realistically, that the time will come when we will inevitably stop breathing. Most of us will wage a last ditch struggle to the bitter end. We will leave this life screaming and choking and clutching for the proverbial straw – but we will die. The Wicked One expressed it in these words, "Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life." Hobbes of Malsbury is quoted as saying upon his deathbed, "If I were master of the world, I would give it all to live one more day." The instinct for self preservation is one of the strongest factors at work in the human family.

Christianity involves death. Jesus said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Matt. 16:24). Paul declared, "I am crucified with Christ" (Gal. 2:20). The sixth chapter of Romans is replete with references to the death which forms a part of Christian conversion. Jesus used an analogy which is both simple and yet profound when he stated: "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal" (John 12:24-25). There is no way for a grain of wheat to produce new life until it dies. In the same way there is no way for an individual to experience the new birth until self is mortally wounded and destroyed.

Death is perhaps the most dramatic and traumatic experience we face in either the world of the spirit or the world of the flesh. We approach conversion reluctantly – it involves death. We cling tenaciously to our own plans, hopes and dreams. We

struggle to maintain our own identity, our own friends and our own ways, but Christianity involves a death. Conversion is often the climax of the most vicious mental and emotional struggle we face between the cradle and the grave, but the corn of wheat that does not die abides alone. The sunshine of a bright new life is waiting beyond the dark threshold of our suicidal surrender to Jesus. We enter that new life by death. When we succumb to self, when we "let go and let God," when we hate our life in this world, we find it unto life eternal.

The Christian abides in the world of Eternal Spring. The cold and bitter winds of winter are gone forever. The old life has disappeared and in its place is found the marvel of tender plants responding to the radiance of a warm and redeeming love. Once this transformation from death to life has been experienced, we will never again face separation from the Father. Jesus is the resurrection and the life, and those who believe in Him shall never die. To be absent from our body is only to be at home with the Lord. The sting of death is gone, and the grave is robbed of its victory. Thanks be to God.

Debates?

Sometime ago I went to sleep listening to a debate between two P.H.D.'s on the subject of creation and evolution. It was nearly midnight and I frequently close out the day by playing something which might be instructive. The next morning I awakened with the stark realization that the Scriptures refer to "debate" as a work of the flesh. It was not yet 5:00 a.m. Why is it fleshly and sinful to debate, I kept asking myself? "Didn't Paul contend for the faith? Didn't he "dispute" with unbelievers virtually every place he was? The answer is obviously "yes," but apparently there was a dramatic difference between what Paul did to convert people to Christ, and what Paul condemned among those people who were already in Christ.

The word "debate" occurs but once in the K.J. version of the Bible (Rom. 1:29). It is from the Greek word "eris" which occurs nine times in the N. T. Scriptures (Rom. 1:20, 13:13; Phil. 1:15; I Cor. 1:11, 3:3; 12:20; Gal. 5:20; I Tim. 6:4; and Titus 3:9). It is translated as: debate, contention, strife, and variance.

When the word occurs in conjunction with the "works of the flesh" in Galatians 5:20 it follows immediately after the sin of "hatred" and is translated in the K.J. version as "variance." Hatred and debates are associated. The one is a state of mind toward people and the other is the result of that state of mind.

When you do not like somebody it is easy to disagree with them and natural to seek to dominate them.

The Christian, however, does not seek to dominate anybody. His desire is to see people surrender to Christ. Whatever discussion the Christian has is colored by a different hue than the ugly debate which merely pits one human mind against another.

William Barclay speaks eloquently to this point in his book, *Flesh and Spirit* (page 44).

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Whenever in a church Jesus Christ is dethroned from the central place, all personal relationships go wrong. When a man begins to preach, or to exalt Jesus Christ, but to exalt his own personal and private view of Jesus Christ, that is to say, when a man preaches a theology rather than a gospel, when a man begins to argue to demolish his opponent rather than to win him, the "eris" comes in.

It is in this vein that Timothy was instructed, "In meekness instructing them that oppose themselves . . ." (II Tim. 2:25). Meekness is listed as a fruit of the Spirit. It denotes an attitude of submission which precludes disputing or resistance. It comes from the Greek word "Prautes" which is the opposite of the brawling, belligerent, and pugnacious spirit of debate.

Titus 3:1-2 puts it like this:

Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work, to speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, showing all meekness unto all men. . . ."

I am constantly reminded of the "dispute" which Michael the archangel had with the Devil over the body of Moses. It never degenerated into a debate because Michael was content to let God be God. He did not have to be right or prove the Devil wrong. He merely said, "The Lord rebuke thee" (Jude 9) and went on about his business.

God give us the meekness to do likewise!

Three Desires

Young's *Analytical Concordance* lists 13 different Hebrew words which all mean "desire." Each has its own particular emphasis and peculiar shade of meaning.

The word upon which we shall focus for this particular study is the Hebrew word "teshugah." Young defines it as "desire, longing." Strong says it means: ". . . in the original sense of stretching out after, a longing, desire." Keil and Delitzsch in their commentary on Genesis are even more radical in their definition (p, 79). They call it ". . . a desire bordering upon disease . . ." and a state that it comes from the root which means ". . . to run, to have a violent craving for a thing. . . ."

The *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* confirms that the noun appears but three times in the Bible First of all it is used of the desire of Eve for Adam (Gen. 3:16), secondly of the desire of sin, crouching like a beast, and desiring Cain (Gen. 4:7), and finally in Song of Solomon 7:10 it is used to describe the desire of the bridegroom for his bride.

Let us pause to reflect upon each occurrence.

As a result of sin the Lord pronounced this curse upon the woman: "I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children . . ." (Gen. 3:16). Once the woman associated her great travail and pain in childbirth with her sexual activity with her husband one might assume that she would never want to be near him again. Yet, the Lord said: "thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee." This is a paradox that borders on the miraculous. In spite of the pain of childbirth, the woman will still have a strong desire and great longing for her husband.

For the purpose of balance let us next consider Song of Solomon 7:10 where the same strong word is also use of the husband. The bride confirms: "I am my beloved's and his desire is toward me." Solomon felt that such a desire was too wonder-

ful for words (Proverbs 30:18-19). he likened it to the thrill of an eagle soaring high above the mountains, or the mystery of a serpent threading its way up the side of a rock without the benefit of arms or legs. It was as majestic and profound as a stately ship which might weigh many tons floating easily upon the bosom of the sea. Since he was a man with a thousand wives his words reflect the perspective of personal experience which cannot be denied.

Finally, let us take another look at Cain. As the firstborn son he undoubtedly excelled in many ways over his younger brother. When God granted respect unto Abel upon the basis of faith Cain was wrought and his countenance was fallen. The Lord tried to reason with him by assuring him that by doing well he, too, could be accepted. But if he chose not to do well he was warned that sin was crouching at the door and "desired" to have him (Gen. 4:7). In the same way that a man has a strong desire for his wife, and a wife has a strong desire for her husband, the devil also has a strong desire. Like a ravenous predator he crouches at the door watching intently for a moment of weakness when he can pounce upon us. Driven as he is by such a strong desire his vigil is too intense for words.

Since these are the only three times this particular word is used in the Sacred Scriptures one might feel led to inquire where the Lord fits in with respect to such desire.

This, too, is a great mystery! For when the Bible talks about the love of the husband for his wife, and the submission of the wife to her husband . . . it is in fact also talking about the relationship of Christ and the Church (Eph. 5:32).

Disciples of Moses

. . . thou art His disciples; but we are Moses' disciple . . .
(John 9:28).

The Bible word "disciple" comes from the Greek "mathetes" which literally means a "learner." Our English word "math" comes from this same root. The noun "mathetes" occurs 264 times in the N. T. Scriptures and is found exclusively in the Gospels and Acts.

In Bible times a disciple would quite frequently live with his teacher. Both John the Baptist and Jesus had disciples like this.

Moses was different. He had been dead for almost 1,500 years. It was not possible for anyone to be his disciple in the primary sense of living in his presence or of following him from town to town. Moses, however, was a writer. The first five books of the Bible are the books of Moses. When a person read those inspired words which Moses wrote, and tried to put them into practice, he became a disciple of Moses.

The invention of writing provided a dramatic breakthrough in the world of education. It was no longer necessary to travel great distances to sit at the feet of some wise scholar or inspired teacher. His exact words could be brought to you in precisely the order in which he gave them.

Even the art of writing, however, was only of limited value until the invention of the printing press. Thus, the world of education took another gigantic stride during the days of John Gutenberg.

The electronic age has continued to accelerate and enhance man's ability to learn. Automated presses produce mountains of material to be read by mankind but the electronic age has done even more. It has made it possible for us to hear the actual voices of our teachers. Not only through loud speakers at some gigantic stadium, but over the radio

waves, and also by means of recordings.

More than twenty years ago I was challenged by the thought that the greatest educational tool of the 20th century was the video cassette. Now it is possible for us to see and hear our teachers over and over again in the privacy of our own homes.

At this very point in writing this article my secretary just brought in the mail. A man from Ohio came across two audio cassettes of messages I had delivered at the 1986 Northmen's convention. He wrote, ". . . I came across the tapes quite by accident, but was thoroughly encouraged by your words. . . ."

Almost every usage of the word "disciple" in the Scriptures involves a personal encounter. Paul, for example, has to journey to Jerusalem to sit at the feet of Gamaliel. Moses and his disciples were an exception . . . because Moses was a writer.

The implications of this are at least twofold. First of all it means that you and I have the privilege of studying at the feet of an almost limitless number of teachers. It does not matter where they live . . . or even when they lived. We can still have the blessed privilege of reading their words . . . and sometimes even hearing their voices and seeing their faces.

In the second place it places before us the opportunity of teaching others who are far beyond the reach of our earthly voice. Someone has written:

The printed page never flinches, never shows cowardice; it never is tempted to compromise; it never tires, never grows disheartened, it travels cheaply, and requires no hired halls; it works while we sleep; it never loses its temper; it works long after we are dead. The printed page is a visitor which gets inside the home, and stays there; it always catches a man in the right mood, for it speaks to him only when he is reading it; it always sticks to what it has said and never answers back; and it is bait permanently left in the pool.

As Jesus commanded - Let's go and make disciples!

Discouragement

Probably no sin ever mentioned in the Bible is as universal, as effective, and as deceptive as the sin of discouragement.

Many temptations appeal to only a specific segment of society. Some will not succumb to the passions of youth or the animal appetites of the carnal mind. Our journey through life provides us with different desires at various stages of development and different pitfalls to face with the changes of climate and terrain – but the temptation of discouragement relentlessly dogs our steps from the cradle to the grave. It hounds the young and old alike. It plagues both rich and poor. No business or occupation provides relief from the constant pressure of this malicious enemy of the soul.

The temptation of discouragement is particularly effective because it always appears to be so harmless and unimportant. We flee from the lions of murder, and immorality into the open and caressing arms of depression and despair. Frequently this proves to be a tragic and fatal mistake. Many who would never dream of theft or adultery consistently seek refuge in the gloomy and dismal shadows of discouragement. It is usually in retrospect that we discover discouragement to be the tiny wedge that pried open a Pandora's box of countless sins. It is usually the discouraged man that turns to alcohol, rape, or suicide. It is the discouraged woman who turns to pills and infidelity. It is the discouraged youth who quits school and experiments with "mind expanding" drugs.

There is no place in the Christian life for discouragement.

God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind (II Tim. 1:7). On the eve of Calvary the Saviour of the world admonished His disciples, "Let not your hearts be troubled. . . ." He said again, "In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

The flames of Christian faith need not be smothered or extinguished by pain and persecution. Listen to these radiant words from a cell in Caesar's prison, ". . . I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him. . . . For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness. . . . And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever" (II Tim. 1:12, 4:6-8, 18).

Take a long look at Lincoln. He failed in business in 1831; defeated for legislature in 1832; failed again in 1833; elected to legislature in 1834; sweetheart died in 1835; nervous breakdown 1838; defeated for land office 1843; defeated for speaker 1836; defeated for Congress 1843; elected to Congress 1846; defeated for Senate 1858. In 1860 Abraham Lincoln was elected as President of the United States of America.

Optimism, persistence, and determination are essential ingredients to every successful life. The world is full of educated derelicts and geniuses who never made good. Every generation is characterized by talented men who tangled with discouragement and tossed in the sponge. Simon Peter was not deterred by his denials and blunders and therefore assumed his place in the Apostle's Hall of Fame. Judas Iscariot gave up and stuck his infamous neck in the coward's noose at Aeldama.

"Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end (Heb. 3:12-14).

Durst

"And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: . . . and believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women" (Acts 5:13-14).

The word "durst" is from the Greek word "Tolmao" which means to "risk" or "dare." This Scripture indicates that a certain segment of society couldn't stand the "risk" of being a Christian, but multitudes were still added to the Lord.

The "risk" of being a Christian probably involved a variety of circumstances which we may never completely comprehend. A few observations, however, are quite obvious.

First of all, there was the hostility of the Jewish leaders. Jesus began his public ministry by a dramatic cleansing of the Temple. He overturned the tables of the money changers and exposed the malignant hypocrisy of the Scribes and Pharisees. They never forgave Him. John 5:18 reveals, ". . . Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill Him. . . ." Matthew confirms: ". . . the Pharisees . . . held a council against Him, how they might destroy Him. . ." (Matt. 12:14). Both of these Scriptures refer to circumstances early in His public ministry.

By the time He raised Lazarus from the dead the Disciples considered a trip to Judea as suicide (John 11:16), a very real danger which culminated at Calvary.

Following the crucifixion we find the Disciples huddled in an upper room, and the doors were shut for fear of the Jews (John 20:19), yet the church was to have its beginning in Jerusalem. How tempting it must have been to start preaching the Gospel somewhere else where the "risk" would not have been so great.

The first days of the Church were marked by hardship and adversity. There were severe economic problems resulting from overcrowding and discrimination. There was persecution from

the Jews who beat and imprisoned the Apostles and who ultimately drove the Christians out of the city. It was a risky business to be a Christian in those days and those who couldn't stand the heat stayed out of the kitchen. But let it forever be remembered that those risky days were days of growth!

Many years have trickled through the hour glass. Cushions have supplanted crosses and comfortable Christians have all but lost the exhilarating element of risk. They prayed for "boldness," and we extol the virtues of "tact" and "diplomacy." We are more cautious with our tithes than they were with their lives.

When the late General MacArthur redeemed the American cause in Korea, he did so at great personal risk. The allied retreat had taken us to the southern extremity of the peninsula, but it had also extended the length of the Communist supply lines. MacArthur made the daring proposal to land troops at Inchon and sever these arteries of supplies vital to Communist troops. When his colleagues refused to concur because of the incommensurable beach at Inchon, MacArthur reasoned that such a circumstance would actually be in our favor. It was the last place the Communists would expect us to attack. MacArthur stood alone, and he was willing to gamble his entire reputation and his career upon the decision. History has vindicated him for his courage.

How will history remember us? Will we be like the man with five talents who risked a total loss to gain five talents more – or will we play it safe and bury our talent in the ground? The church of the First Century was a church that took risks. "Durst" anyone follow their example?