

A Quarterly Journal

(A presentation by email)

“LIGHT FOR OUR AGE”

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*“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.”
Psalm 119:105*

Feature One: Editorial

Is The Age of Pluralism Upon Us?

Let me begin this article with a quotation from a **Chattanooga Times Free Press** newspaper article written by Clint Cooper on July 13th of this year.

“In the Christian tradition of the 1960s and ‘70s, the tradition that formed my spiritual background, one underlying truth was that Jesus was ‘the way, the truth, and the life,’ and that no one came to God except through him.

But I, like many other Christians, wondered about the

kind, wonderful people of other religious traditions. Were they automatically condemned because they didn't profess that Jesus was their savior but were living the kind of life he taught us to live?

And the people in the least-developed parts of the world, who had never heard of Christianity, much less Judaism or Islam, were they doomed?"

The article continues to justify this change of belief and the acceptance of pluralism, the doctrine that God accepts all religions. Is there a possibility that this might be true? Have we been wrong throughout the ages proclaiming that the only way to God, the Father, was through His Son, Jesus the Christ?

Perhaps first we should examine why this change of religious doctrine has appeared. It is not new. I first heard this suggested back in 1971. A preacher was telling about a young mother that sacrificed her first-born child to her crocodile god. He suggested that her sincerity was so great that certainly God would accept her sacrifice. This is a doctrine of human emotion. Some do not understand how or why God cannot accept all people.

Let me begin a defense of the Biblical position by suggesting that people often look at salvation in a backward fashion. By that I mean people think of God sending people to Hell rather than God wanting to save people from Hell. Let me explain by an illustration. Picture yourself standing on the bank of the Niagara River not too far back from the falls. I have been there and seen the power of that river. It is incredible. At some safe distance from the falls I observed a rope across the river preventing people in canoes from getting trapped in the fast flowing current further on down the river.

Picture that rope missing and a canoe full of people do not realize they

are getting into the danger area of the river. By the time they realize they have traveled too close to the falls it is too late to paddle to safety. In their panic the canoe overturned. You are far enough back from the falls to see this tragedy. At the foot of the tree by which you are standing is a long rope attached to a life preserver. You then pick up the coil of rope and throw out the life preserver in the direction of these people. You yell and scream for them to try for this way of escape.

One man is behind the canoe and doesn't hear or see you. One man gives up, and doesn't care. A third man grabs a floating log, thinking that is what you threw out to him. A fourth man reaches the life preserver, but he lets go and the current sweeps him away. The last man also reaches the life preserver and hangs on while you pull him to safety.

What would happen to all the others? They would be swept over the falls to their death yet you did everything possible to save them. I believe this to be an illustration presenting what Jesus has done for mankind. He became our life preserver. But we can only be saved by Him.

The Bible teaches: "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:" Romans 5:12. Clearly we have all sinned in this life. Therefore we are like the people in the overturned canoe. We are all in the river of sin and we will all go over the falls of death and destruction that will last for eternity. Our only hope lies in grabbing the life preserver given to us by our Father in Heaven. That is exactly what Jesus said in the text quoted by Mr. Cooper. Jesus is the only way we can reach the Father, or reach heaven.

Now, does the Bible support this statement by Jesus? The Apostle

Paul thought so. Concerning those that have never heard of Jesus, he wrote:

“And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, 8 In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: 9 Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power;” (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9)

There are two groups that Paul identifies that will be lost eternally. The first is the group that does not know God, and the second is the group that does not obey God. That is exactly what the illustration of the canoe teaches. Jesus is the only way out of sin.

Paul also risked his own life to teach the message of Christ. If everyone is going to be saved, then why did he endure the following?

“...in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. 24 Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. 25 Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; 26 In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; 27 In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.” (2 Corinthians 11:23-27)

Paul often risked his life because what he taught was offensive to those that heard the gospel of Christ. Jesus actually said in Luke:

“Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. 33 But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven. 34 Think not that I am

come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. 35 For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. 36 And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. 37 He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. 38 And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.” (Matthew 10:32-38)

Notice in this text Jesus states that those that do not confess that Jesus is Lord before men will be denied by Him to His Father. He also indicates that it will be a difficult life to follow. If you follow any other deity or man, you deny Jesus.

Further, the writer of the Hebrew letter stated:

“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, 2 Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds;” (Hebrews 1:1-2)

God did not speak through Mohammad or Buddha. He spoke through Jesus.

So, in the words of Joshua of old:

“And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” (Joshua 24:15)

Feature Two: *an article by R. C. Oliver from his radio work*

Instrumental Music

Sinful In The Worship

It has been my privilege to talk with a great number of religious-minded people, several ministers included who are very much surprised when I make the remark that "I believe instrumental music to be sinful when used in the worship of God." They are usually eager to enquire as to why and how I have reached, to them, such a strange and absurd conclusion. I remember an occasion that took place some two years ago. That occasion I shall never forget, I received word that I was to speak for the church of Christ in Sebring, Ohio, a congregation of about five hundred, on a certain Lord's Day at both the morning and evening services. I did not know until shortly before I left that it was the Christian Church and that they used the instruments of music in their worship. Nevertheless, one of the elders, knowing the position that I took, silenced the organ in both services and Brother Selwyn Sutterfield, of River Rough, Michigan, conducted the song service for me. I did not request them to do this, neither did I know they were going to until after I had arrived. That night, just before service, I was questioned by a fine young man of the congregation concerning the "silent organ". I suggested that he wait until after the evening service and I would be glad to talk to him, and all others interested in the matter. At the close of the service a class of about forty assembled, including the elders, and with Bibles in hand we began our study. We continue the class until almost midnight. Some of the points of our discussion in the class I will give you for your own investigation, that the joy of that study might live in you as it has continued to live in me.

It Is Not Of Faith

Where there is no testimony, there can be no faith. In that instrumental music is not one time commanded in the teachings of Christ, it is impossible to offer it to God by faith. "For faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God." (Romans 10:17) Therefore, in that there is no testimony for instrumental music it cannot be offered by faith. And in that it cannot be offered by faith, it is sin. "For whatsoever is not of faith is sin." (Romans 14:23) Hence, instrumental music in the worship of God is sinful!

It Is Presumptuous

A large percent of the class reasoned from the standpoint that it "seems all right, hence it is all right". But wait a minute! Where has God ever said, "Feel on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved?" Where has the Lord said, "Just as long as a thing 'seems' right, it is right?" It "seemed" right to Nadab and Abihu to offer "strange" fire unto the Lord, but that didn't make it right. Instrumental music is not a question of knowledge or faith, but is purely an opinion and full of presumption. David said, "Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins." (Psalm 19:13).

It Is Not In The Teachings of Christ

We are told who has God and who doesn't have God. 2 John 1:9 reads as follows: "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son." It is impossible for one to uphold the use of instrumental music in worship and do it by the authority of the New Testament. For in no place does the New

Testament (teachings of Christ) command us to use instrumental music in the worship of Jehovah. Hence, in order to teach the use of the instrument, one must go “outside” the teachings of Christ to do so. When you go “outside” the teachings of Christ John said, “you don’t have God!” Therefore, those churches that use instrumental music, in worship, do not have God and are therefore not churches of Christ. If in any sense they were every His churches, they are in grave danger, and should repent and turn unto Him quickly!

The Law of Exclusion Forbids It

In that Christ has commanded “vocal music” instead of instrumental music, the law of exclusion forbids the latter. The command to use “gopher” wood excluded the use of any other kind of wood. (Genesis 6:14). When the Lord tells us what he wants, that should be sufficient. When He tells us what He wants He doesn’t have to tell us what he doesn’t want. If you send someone to the grocery store for you, you tell him or her what you want. It is not necessary to tell them what you do not want. Just so, the Lord commanded “vocal” music and that excludes the “instrumental” music.

Christ Commanded Vocal Music

There are two “kinds” of music: vocal and instrumental. Has Christ commanded just one or both? Here are two of the passages in which we find “vocal” is the command.

Colossians 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another

in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace
in your hearts to the Lord.

Ephesians 5:19 Speaking to yourselves in psalms
and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody
in your heart to the Lord;

But the command to play an instrument can't be found because it just is not there. Hence, singing is the only acceptable music. Let me illustrate. In Leviticus 10:1-2 we have two "kinds" of fire mentioned, just like here we have two "kinds" of music mentioned. One was fire that the Lord had "commanded" and the other was "strange" fire. Now the question is, were both fires accepted by the Lord? The answer is No! Only one fire was accepted. Why did God reject the other fire and what made it "strange?" The answer is in verse 1. It was "strange" because it was fire that the Lord had not commanded. If the fire was strange because it was not commanded, what about instrumental music, which is not commanded? Would it not be "strange music"? If not, why not? Remember, just so it was fire was not enough. It had to be fire that the Lord commanded. In like manner, just so it is music is not sufficient. It must be the music that Christ has commanded. The result of offering strange fire meant death to Nadab and Abihu. God is no respecter of persons. The judgment is coming! None will be able to escape it! Whose side are you on? The Lord says "singing". The devil says you may "play". Which do you believe?

Feature Three: Sandy's Women's Corner

A SAD STRANGER

Last Friday we sat at the hospital with one of our elders and his family while the elder's wife had surgery. It was about a three-hour surgery, and everything went fine.

We took a short break about lunchtime, and we sat in the cafeteria for only about 20 minutes or so. Something happened during that time that has been on my mind and caused me to reflect on how we look at others.

I am a people-watcher. I can't help myself. No matter where I am, I look around and am always intrigued by people—what they look like, their expressions, their interactions with other people, and their other non-verbal communications.

As we were visiting with the family, I noticed a lady sitting a few tables away from us. She was obviously an employee of the hospital. She was wearing scrubs and a cap, and I assumed she was a nurse or aide in surgery.

I actually heard this lady before I saw her. I could hear someone sobbing softly; and when I looked around, it was the lady I just described.

She had her face turned toward a window, her half-eaten lunch in front of her, and her head propped in her hand. She was obviously distraught, and I found myself feeling really sorry for her.

I wanted to go to her, put my arms around her, and just let her cry. But I was afraid! I didn't know how she would react, and I didn't want to interfere. She cried the entire time we were sitting there, and she was still sobbing when we left.

I can't get her out of my mind. I still feel so sad when I think about her. The passage from Matthew 25 comes to mind. Jesus promises to welcome into the kingdom those that feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, take in strangers, clothe the naked, and visit the sick and those in prison. He says in verse 40, "...As you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me."

Remember the Samaritan woman. She almost missed a chance to interact with Jesus. He asked her for a drink of water; and she almost didn't give it to Him because He was a Jew, and she was a Samaritan.

The rich young ruler missed an opportunity to follow Jesus because he was unwilling to give up his wealth. He just went away sorrowful.

I realize these events in the life of Christ are not the same as the experience I had last week, but both of them were missed opportunities or near missed opportunities. What might have happened if the rich young ruler had done as Jesus asked him to do? He might have become one of the

chosen disciples. What if I had taken the opportunity to show sympathy to a stranger? Would I have made a difference in her life? Sadly, I will never know.

I do hope I will not miss an opportunity like that again!

Feature Four: Our Communication:

The Written Presentation

Most people, if they are to speak in public like to write out their presentation. Certainly, if you write out what you want to say, you can be sure of your wording. However, there are a few problems you will face with this style of presentation.

In most cases when you write out your speech you tend not to look at your audience, but rather at what you have read. To have good communication it is essential that you know your speech well enough to have most of your focus on the audience. I always recommend that a speaker at least memorize his first and last paragraphs. The first paragraph is where you will grab the attention of the audience, and the last paragraph is most likely what you will want your audience to remember.

In an oratory (written presentation) people often fail to gesture, or use their arms and hands to emphasize what they are saying. It is always good to give yourself “stage notes” on your speech. Underline where a good gesture would fit, or where you want to pause.

Finally remember that we tend to read faster than we speak. Be sure

you practice slowing down and emphasizing the words of your presentation. If you time your speech it should be about 125 words per minute.

Feature Five: Bible Question

I recently received the following question: *“I would like to know, if when we die we are sleeping until God comes for us. When we first open our eyes will we see loved ones?”* Also: *“What is the name of the place where we will be sleeping after death and where is it at?”*

These are excellent questions, and I believe the Bible answers your questions in Luke 16:19-31.

“ There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence. Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also

come into this place of torment. Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."

Some have called this a parable, but it is too specific to be a parable. All the parables are general in nature. There was a woman who lost a coin; there was a man planting seed. Yet in this story we have a "certain" rich man, and a man named Lazarus. Jesus used his power of knowing all things to teach us something about life after death.

His main lesson is that we must obey the teaching of Christ. But look at the information Jesus gives us. Both Lazarus and the rich man have died. Lazarus nor the rich man are asleep. Lazarus is in a place of comfort, and the rich man is in a place of pain and suffering. The rich man begs for comfort from Lazarus, but Abraham explains that there is a great gulf between them that cannot be crossed. Then the rich man remembers his brothers alive on the earth and asked Abraham to send Lazarus to them.

Here are some things we can determine by this story.

1. Both the rich man and Lazarus were conscious after they died.
2. There is a place of torment and a place of comfort, depending on how we live in this life.

3. The world continues on after we die as we note that the rich man's brothers were still living.
4. This also lets us know that this is before the judgment of Christ, again because the world is still continuing.
5. This was before the law of Christ was established (in Acts 2) for Abraham told the rich man his brothers must obey the Law of Moses.

As to where this place is, we do not know. It is in the spiritual world and under God's control. I hope this helps. Let me know if you need more information on this or any subject.

Humor: The Little Boy and the Preacher

A minister called a family that had been visiting the congregation where he was preaching. He felt that a phone call might encourage them to continue attending.

A voice answered with a whispered, "Hello..."

Preacher: "Who is this?"

Whisper: "Jimmy"

Preacher: "How old are you, Jimmy?"

Whisper: "Four."

Preacher: "Jimmy, may I please speak to your mother?"

Whisper: "She's busy."

Preacher: "Then, may I speak to your dad?"

Whisper: "He's busy."

Preacher: "Are there any other adults at your home?"

Whisper: "The police."

Preacher: "Then let me speak with one of the police officers."

Whisper: "They're busy."

Preacher: "Who else is there?"

Whisper: "Firemen."

Preacher: "Well, put one of the firemen on the phone."

Whisper: "They're busy."

Preacher: "Jimmy, what are they all busy doing...?"

Whisper: "They're looking for me."

In Closing:

If anyone perchance has a copy of Volume 2, 2011 I would appreciate your sending me a copy. When I transferred my material from my old PC to my MacBook it was somehow lost. I trust everyone will have a great "end of year".

Bob Oliver