

think

CURRENT ISSUES FROM A DISTINCTLY CHRISTIAN VIEW

MARCH 2012

**THIRTY-THREE
DEGREES OF
DECEPTION**

Page 18

(secret societies)


**IS FREEMASONRY A
RELIGIOUS INSTITUTION?**

AN AMERICANIZED GATEWAY

FREEMASONRY CONSEQUENCES



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A large, fluffy white dandelion seed head is in the lower-left foreground. Several dandelion seeds with their feathery parachutes are captured in mid-air, drifting towards the upper-right corner of the frame. The background is a clear, vibrant blue sky with a few wispy white clouds near the bottom.

"That we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ."

EPHESIANS 4:14-15

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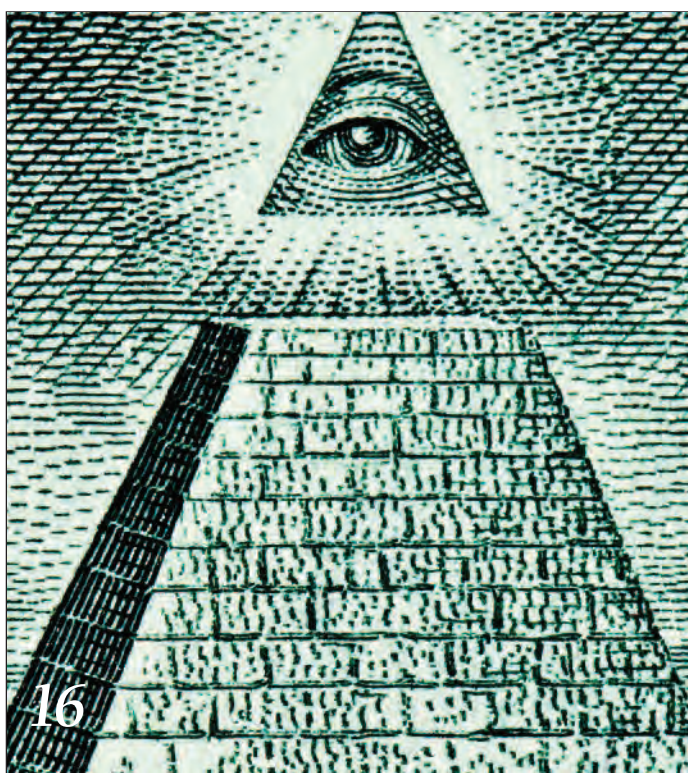
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SECRET allegiances

Allegiance is something with which we are all familiar. Some individuals have flags flapping on their cars during the fall demonstrating allegiance to a particular football team. Others have stickers on their cars showing allegiance to the university from which they graduated. But what happens when this allegiance mushrooms to the point that it overshadows spiritual issues? Surely Christians would never put a sports team or a college above the Lord's church or God ... would they? Sadly, we know the answer is not always "No."

God demands our allegiance. Allow us to restate this so that it isn't missed: God is not satisfied with second place (see Exodus 20: 2-5). He will not take second to a football team or an alma mater. In fact, Jesus Christ said, "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me" (Matthew 10:37-38). God expects Christians to be loyal servants.

Far too often we don't see our allegiances to worldly things for what they really are. We believe our "causes" are justified even though in reality they are self-serving and have nothing to do with Scripture. We are simply fulfilling our own selfish desires. In short, we have committed "spiritual adultery," as something has taken the spot in our heart which should be reserved for Almighty God Himself. James addressed this

Paul, when he wrote his second letter to the people of Corinth, encouraged them to be holy. He rebuked them for being "restricted by their own affections" (6:12). He then admonished them:

Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God. And they shall be My people" (2 Corinthians 6:14-16).

We recognize that many of these secret societies do good works, as do social clubs, fraternities, and sororities. But we also recognize that there is typically a loyalty and allegiance required in them that goes beyond what God would have us be. Do good works justify putting anything before God?

We hope that this issue of *Think* will cause our readers to consider their "allegiances." For some it may be a football team. For others it may be the Masonic Lodge or a social club. Our challenge to you is to re-assess. As Paul said, "Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:1-2). Our hope is that we will take up this challenge not just when it is convenient, but **every day**. We all know that conforming is easier and in some cases may be more "fun," but we hope you will be transformed and take the road less traveled. As always we hope you will think on these things. ▲

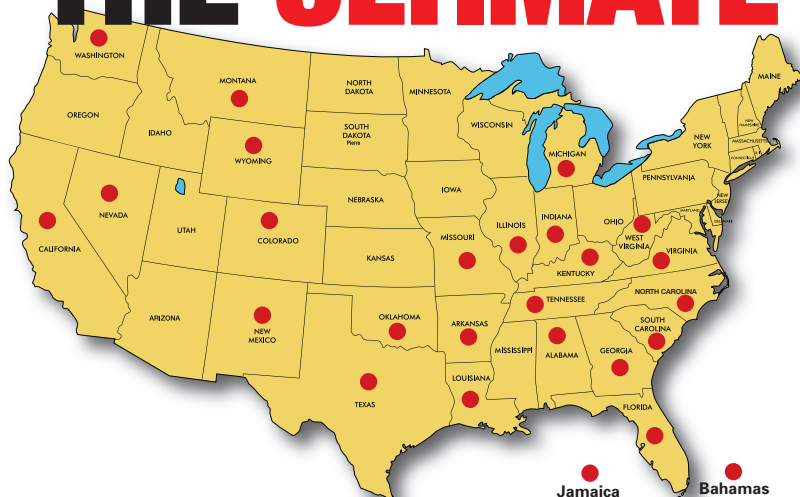
BE TRANSFORMED AND TAKE THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED

spiritual adultery when he rebuked the twelve tribes abroad: "Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God" (James 4:4).

In this issue of *Think* magazine, we are addressing allegiance to secret societies (e.g. freemasonry, eastern star). We recognize that for some this may hit close to home and may be a very uncomfortable or emotional subject. As always, we hope that Christians have the ability to distance themselves from their own personal emotions and focus and meditate on what God's Word has to say in the matter. This issue of *Think* is not to condemn, but rather to inform and enlighten.



MISSION AWAKEN! THE **ULTIMATE** ROAD TRIP.



● = states/countries visited

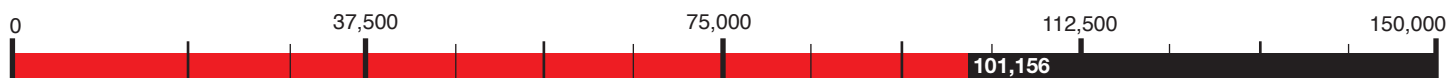


It has been said that for the past few decades Christians have had their heads buried in the sand, only to pull them up and realize our society has been hijacked by atheists, humanists, Muslims, materialists, and evolutionists. We believe it is time to awaken from our stupor and to once again become that city on a hill—the light to the world. Over the next two years, Dr. Brad Harrub and Joe Wells aim to crisscross the nation, helping to awaken Christians who have fallen prey to apathy. We aim to rekindle the fire that many have allowed to grow dim. Our goal is to engage people in all 50 states, covering over 150,000 miles—demonstrating that we can once again turn the world upside down. **We solicit your prayers as we tackle Mission Awaken!** If you have questions or would like your congregation to participate, please contact our office at 615-324-5870. Additionally, if you have a well-running RV that you can donate to this non-profit effort, please contact our office as well. We look forward to updating you each month on the progress of this nationwide campaign.

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CHERYL REYES

I have been into the book *iGrow Daily Devotional* and I am growing spiritually with the daily devotionals in it. I am really enjoying the study time. It is really helping me to stay focused.

A.C.

You will never know how much I appreciate you taking the time out of your busy schedules to actually study with my husband. I have watched his entire belief system change since you all began studying. When I first contacted you I was literally at the end of my rope. Today I am thankful to have a husband who is zealous and excited about Christianity. While I am not sure how you get it all done, I am thankful that in our case you found the time!

THE LINDSEYS

We appreciate the work you all are doing. The *Think* articles are brief and concise. They also give encouragement for living the Christian life.

RAMONA TANNER

Hope this amount helps somewhat in your good work. We have enjoyed all your meetings that we've attended and appreciate all the good things you do in our Lord's cause. May God be with you.

JERRY WATSON

Thank you for the work you are doing for the Lord. I pray for the continuance in speaking the Gospel. It truly helps me to do what I can.

DAVE, CHRISTY, MIKEY, AND TIMOTHY LUCICH

Thank you so much for the work you are doing with Focus Press. We were very energized after Brad's meeting at East Main. We have since enjoyed several things from the Focus Press website as well as loaning the CDs of the meeting out to family and friends. I am using the Bible Study Guide curriculum with my five-year-old at home and my three-year-old class at church. Needless to say, we very much appreciate the work you all do and wanted to take the time to let you know. Thank you.

JUNE C.

I think the August 2011 issue on forgiveness is one of your best. In most of the articles I noticed one identifying requirement for forgiveness: love. I am reminded of 1 Corinthians 13:13—and now abides faith, hope, and love; but the greatest of these is love.

Love doesn't matter unless all that matters is love—true love.

From the Road...

A few weeks ago I took my two oldest sons with me on an overseas mission trip to a third world country. This was a mission trip that I paid for out of my own pocket, rather than asking for church sponsors. I viewed this campaign as an investment—a spiritual investment in my children. For eight days I had the luxury of spending enormous amounts of time with my sons as we knocked doors together, conducted Bible studies together, and held a Gospel meeting. Our accommodations were far from luxurious, there were occasional questions about what exactly we were eating, and the work was hard. We put in many 15-16 hour days, which caused my oldest son to exclaim one afternoon that he was exhausted "but in a good way, Dad." My sons got to see firsthand how blessed they really are. They got to witness individuals baptized who were reached through our campaign. There are plenty of ways to spend money on a child—camps, video games, athletics, amusement parks, etc. Why not make an investment that will positively affect them for the rest of their lives? Why not involve them first hand in the work of the Lord! ▲ BH

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Over the past couple of months, we have been holding the Discovery Channel accountable for its series called “Who was Jesus?” which is intended to lead the viewer away from the truth about Jesus. I stated back in January that the series had 3 specific agendas:

- 1. Portray Jesus as one whose mission was focused on economic and social justice.**
- 2. Raise doubts about the legitimacy, accuracy, and authority of the Gospels.**
- 3. Imply that only science can reveal the truth about who Jesus was.**

In February, we walked through the efforts of Discovery Channel to redefine the stated mission of Jesus, “to seek and save the lost” (Luke 19:10), to an alternative mission that is focused on providing economic and social justice to the poor. I exposed their true intentions to change Jesus from a personal Savior to a leader of a social movement.

How does this series titled “Who was Jesus?” attempt to discredit the authority and legitimacy of the Bible and the Gospel accounts? Let me provide a few examples.

While discussing the arrest of Jesus as documented in the Gospels, Baptist minister Allen Callahan tells the audience that it is more likely that the disciples “turned tail and ran.” Along with the narrator, Allen believes the account of Peter cutting off the ear of the high priest’s servant Malchus is probably a case of “spin-doctoring” by the Gospel writers. Spin-doctoring? Does Allen realize that the account of Peter cutting off the ear of the servant is documented in all four Gospels? Allen’s reasoning as stated in the documentary is because it is likely that Peter would have been arrested for attacking a member of the “arresting party.” So Allen is placing his own human wisdom above the documented history of the Gospel writers who were witnesses to the arrest.

Didn’t Allen notice that Jesus placed His hand on the ear of Malchus and healed it immediately (Luke 22:51)? Such an action would likely have a response of amazement and they did not arrest Peter since, in the end, there was no damage done.

I suppose it is possible that Allen does not believe that Jesus actually healed the servant’s ear. During one segment of the documentary, Allen attempts to minimize the miracles of Jesus by introducing the viewers to other “miracle workers” of the time that were less well-known. He states that “Jesus was one among several [miracle workers] ... clearly [h]e was extraordinary, but no, [h]e was not unique.” Not unique? This is a Baptist

minister who just said that the miracles of Jesus were not unique!

So-called “Biblical expert” Rachel Havrelock takes her shot at the authority and accuracy of the Scriptures by raising the question that maybe Jesus was not actually born in Bethlehem. She believes the Gospel writers probably added that because they needed His birthplace to be consistent with the “Jewish tradition that the Messiah can come from nowhere else but Bethlehem.” What is Rachel’s evidence of this claim? She has none! She simply doesn’t think it is likely that a pregnant woman would travel such a long distance in such difficult times.



None of this makes sense to me! Why are a Baptist minister and a “Biblical expert” raising doubts about the inspiration and accuracy of the Bible?

Well ... actually, it does make sense to me. If the agenda of Allen and Rachel is to bring about social change and advance socialism, Marxism, or communism (all rooted in atheism) ... then it makes perfect sense. See, they are not interested in teaching about Jesus Christ the Savior of mankind. They are not interested in teaching about God’s plan for salvation. They are not interested in teaching us that Jesus had a message of hope, not for equality of the rich and poor, but a message of hope for the “kingdom of God.”

They are attempting to infiltrate the mind of those who believe in the Bible. They want to plant a seed of doubt in the minds of Christians. After all, if the viewer trusts these “experts” who tells them that the Bible is filled with “spin-doctoring,” maybe the whole thing is fiction. The ultimate goal of social justice cannot be obtained if people believe the Bible is, in fact, the inspired Word of God.

“Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits” (Matthew 7:15-16).

Make no mistake ... the Discovery Channel series “Who was Jesus?” and all those involved are ravenous wolves. ▲

For more information and to watch video evidence of these claims, go to www.DissectingDelusions.com.

OF MAGIC AND MIRACLES

When atheists are looking to blame Christianity for all that is wrong in the world, they will run through the usual litany of crimes against humanity, including the Crusades and the house arrest of Galileo.¹ My first reaction is to say that this has nothing to do with New Testament Christianity.

My second reaction is to point out that much of what we think we know about these events comes to us from people who have an axe to grind against the medieval Catholic Church, Christianity, religion, or all the above. Real historians have done their best to set the record straight, which the New Atheists blithely ignore as they regale the unfaithful with sordid tales of Christians acting unChrist-like.

The same rap sheet usually includes the witch-hunts of the late 1500s and early 1600s. According to some estimates, around 110,000 people were tried for witchcraft, and as many as 60,000 may have been executed.² Critics blame these horrors on what they take to be the inherent evils of religion. In an earlier time the church was faulted for its irrational belief in witchcraft. Today, in the cultural morass we call Postmodernism, the medieval church is faulted for picking on elderly women, or pagan worshipers, or both.

Again, I would reply that the witch hunters were hardly following the teaching of Christ and His apostles. Nor were they following legal precedent from the so-called Dark Ages. In 785 A.D., Charlemagne enacted martial law on the newly conquered pagans of Saxony. Article 6 of that law blamed belief in witchcraft on the deceptions of the devil and imposed the death penalty on anyone who burned a witch.³ Misguided vigilantes posed more of a threat to life and property than poor benighted “witches.”

Charlemagne and his contemporaries wrote magic off as a pagan fantasy. In this respect, they were closer to the Christian worldview. From a Biblical standpoint, nature works in a regular way until God intervenes. There is no room for magic and witchcraft because God reigns supremely over both the natural and the supernatural. The great witch hunts of later centuries undermined this view by giving witchcraft a newfound credibility.⁴

The whole point of magic—or maybe that should be magick—is that there are hidden forces within nature that can be manipulated for good or evil. Don’t get this confused with magic used as a plot element in Lewis’ Narnia series or Tolkien’s Lord of the Rings.

And don’t get this confused with the stage magic used by entertainers who pull rabbits out of hats. To claim that magic is something more—that it is metaphysically real—is to deny the Biblical worldview.

This is why the Bible takes a no-holds-barred approach to magic, sorcery, and divination. Under the Old Law, sorceresses were put to death (Exodus 22:18). This may sound harsh, but sorcery represented a clear and present danger to God’s chosen nation. If the Israelites could be conned into thinking that a pagan sorceress had real gifts of sorcery, then perhaps they could be conned into accepting her prophetic guidance as well, which could lead the people into life-threatening situations.

This helps us understand a potentially difficult passage in 1 Samuel 28. On the eve of his final battle, Saul consults the medium of En Dor. He asks her to conduct a séance with the dearly departed Samuel and, indeed, the spirit of the prophet appears in their presence. But is Samuel’s appearance a genuine piece of sorcery or the work of God? The woman’s reaction gives it away: She cries out in shock. She is shocked because she has never been able to summon the spirits of the dead. Her mediumship is a fraud, and she knows it.

The same skepticism holds throughout the New Testament, and especially in Acts. Luke repeatedly draws a distinction between the real power of the Apostles and the fraudulent claims of people like Simon and Elymas (8:9-25; 13:4-12). The Apostles’ miracles are not tricks; they are not demonic; they are not self-serving. Their power is from God, just as the Gospel they are preaching is from God.

Mystics and charlatans were not the only ones with a magic problem. Christians in Ephesus still clung to their magical scrolls (19:18-19). Their worldview was confused and incomplete.

It has to make us wonder: How much stock do we put in black cats and four-leaf clovers? Maybe it’s not witches or magic for us. Maybe it’s something else, like astrology or evolution. But clearly there are consequences for not building a thoroughly Christian worldview. ▲

1 Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion*. London: Bantam, 2006, pg. 1, ad nauseum.

2 Edward Peters, “Witchcraft,” *Encyclopedia of the Scientific Revolution*. New York: Garland, 2000, pg. 1069.

3 See Arend Quak, editor, *Speculum Saxonum*. Rodopi: Amsterdam, 1999, pg. 34 fn. 21.

4 Karen Jolly, *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe*. London: Athlone, 2002, pg. 23-26.

THE OLD LAW

Having looked in the tearful eyes of parents whose children have abandoned the Faith, I have learned there are a million miles between our children “going through the motions” in reference to their spiritual lives versus our children possessing hearts that dictate their actions. In this column, I plan to share with you what I hope to instill in the hearts of my children and those whom I love.

They are not as common as they used to be. Twenty-five years ago you could find the Ten Commandments posted in various places of business or even classrooms. Today, the very sight of the Ten Commandments draws harsh words and lawsuits. More and more businesses and public places are removing the commands for fear of vitriol from the ACLU.

This militant “anti-God” pursuit has caused an unexpected backlash. Many in the denominational world have put up yard signs containing the Ten Commandments. Many congregations have encouraged their members to display them proudly at homes or in private businesses in an effort to stem the immoral tide of our nation.

Children reared in Christian homes are not blind to the fight going on around them. They hear news accounts each month over the battle. They are acutely aware that the commands are no longer allowed in school classrooms. They sit in Bible classes that discuss each individual command. But sadly, many children never understand what the Law of Moses means to a New Testament Christian.



Here’s what I intend on teaching my children about the Ten Commandments and the Old Law.

The Ten Commandments are a part of God’s inspired Word, and they are definitely something we can learn from (Romans 15:4). It doesn’t bother me to see them posted, other than it makes me realize that someone only knows part of the beautiful story God has painted for us today! I am extremely thankful that Jesus nailed that Old Law to the cross (Colossians 2:13-14). That Old Law served a purpose in God’s plan. It was designed to help purify a nation and lead them toward Christ. In addition, it set God as the standard for right and wrong and reminded individuals of their transgressions (Galatians 3:19-25). But that Old Law had a problem, as it could not take away sins (Hebrews 10:1-4).

While some associate the Law of Moses with just ten “Thou shall not ...” commandments (found in Exodus 20), there were actually many more instructions mentioned. Those commands were given to Moses on stone tablets written by the finger of God (Exodus 31:18). The Ten Commandments we read in Exodus 20 were the principles that God would then expound on. We can find additional laws throughout the latter part of Exodus and in the books of Leviticus and Numbers. God was trying to demonstrate what was unclean and sinful to these people—but it could not justify the people of that day (Galatians 3:10-13).

As such, the Old Law was a temporary law that was given to the Israelites. Think of it like this: A new section of multi-lane interstate is being built. But while it is under construction there is a bumpy and temporary pathway around to the other side. Only one group of people got to use that bumpy, “under construction” path. That’s what the Old Law was like. When Jesus died, He tore down the “under construction” sign permanently, got rid of that old bumpy path, and He opened up a beautiful stretch of interstate available to everyone.

That’s why I’m thankful that we live under a new covenant—it is open to Jew and Gentile! The Bible says Jesus has become a surety of a **better** covenant (Hebrews 7:22). For it is the blood of Christ that is able to wash away sins. Take a close look at the following Scriptures: 1 Peter 1:18-19; 1 John 1:7; Revelation 1:5. In His final act on earth, Jesus tore off the yoke of bondage which was from the Old Law that had been on the Jewish people (Galatians 5:1).

You might ask: Are we still under the Ten Commandments today? Let me answer with another question: Would you still want to use that old bumpy, “under construction” pathway when you have access to a beautiful new paved interstate? Today we are free from the Old Law (Romans 7:1-6). Some might say we still follow nine of the original Ten Commands. How can we follow something if Jesus nailed it to the cross and we are free from it? What these individuals mean is that the New Law records for us nine of the same principles/commands.

As you study the Old Testament, I pray that you will gain a greater understanding of what was required under the Law of Moses. For if you understand the Old Law, you will have a much better appreciation and understanding of what Jesus did for you. You will also have a bigger appreciation for a God who has had a redemptive plan for you since the creation of the world! ▲

Love,
Dad

HAVE WE FORGOTTEN RESPONSIBILITY AND DILIGENCE?

You and my neighbors both may find it strange this spring to see my 8-year-old daughter out mowing the lawn (supervised of course). Some might think it's child abuse. My wife and I see it as building the godly character of responsibility and diligence. You see, my daughter has been begging for two years to push that lawn mower. Can you guess why? Because we have trained her older siblings to work hard and mow and she couldn't wait to get in on the action! My wife and I decided long ago that hard work is going to be a part of the DNA of our family, just like it was when we grew up.

I am afraid that the godly character trait of being responsible and diligent is rarely being taught and demonstrated in homes today, perhaps even in Christian families. These are families that love the Lord but the parents have very low standards when it comes to training their children to be responsible with their time and talents. When a parent gives a child, no matter the age, virtually everything he wants and then lets him do as he wishes, the result is almost always going to be negative.

In studying with two dedicated mothers about parenting, one of them mentioned that she had a very difficult time with her five-year old because she was constantly picking up after him. His room was always a disaster and he made a mess of the house all day long. I explained to her that the mess he was making was only the symptom. The lack of responsibility was the godly trait that needed attention. I went on to tell her that if she will clearly communicate her expectations and then hold him to those expectations by providing compelling consequences, his actions would change in a matter of days. A week later, the Christian mother was so happy. She said within two days she had a different boy. He became a responsible five-year old who picked up all his toys after he played with them, made his bed when he got up in the morning, and did his chores around the house each day. That mother is now being blessed because she is training her boy to be diligent and to fulfill his role in the home.

The sad reality is that parents who do not train their children to be diligent end up with 15-years olds (and in many cases 25-year olds) who act like 5-year olds. Is it within the will of God that our children spend endless hours playing video games, watching TV, listening to their iPod, or chatting on Facebook? If we, as Christian parents, are not proactive about training our children to be hard workers, helping around the house, and using their time wisely, we will surely pay the consequences for a generation who has been enabled to dodge responsibility.

"It is easy to dodge our responsibilities, but we cannot dodge the consequences of dodging our responsibilities" (Sir Josiah Stamp). There are severe consequences that come with the neglect of training our youth to be diligent. For example, God says, "Poor is he who works with a negligent hand, but the hand of the diligent makes rich" (Proverbs 10:4, NASB). God has always commanded his people to work hard and be productive. We should all be thankful that Noah had hard-working sons to help build that massive boat before the rains came. The virtuous woman in Proverbs 31 was commended when it was said of her, "Give her the product of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates" (31:31, NASB). The Christians in Thessalonica became lazy while waiting on the Lord's return, and Paul rebuked and instructed them by saying, "For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: If anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either. For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies. Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread" (2 Thessalonians 3:10-12, NASB).

The byproduct of a life that is not trained to be diligent and responsible is a life of laziness, entitlement, emptiness, and low self-worth. When a child is enabled to waste his time, talent, and energy, the responsibility falls back on the parents! It becomes our fault. It is our task in life to train up our children in the way they should go (Proverbs 22:6). The broad way is full of men and women who are lazy and full of excuses. It is a blessing to our children when they witness us walking the committed road, taking responsibility for our lives and working hard as Christians. ▲



THIS CHANGES EVERYTHING

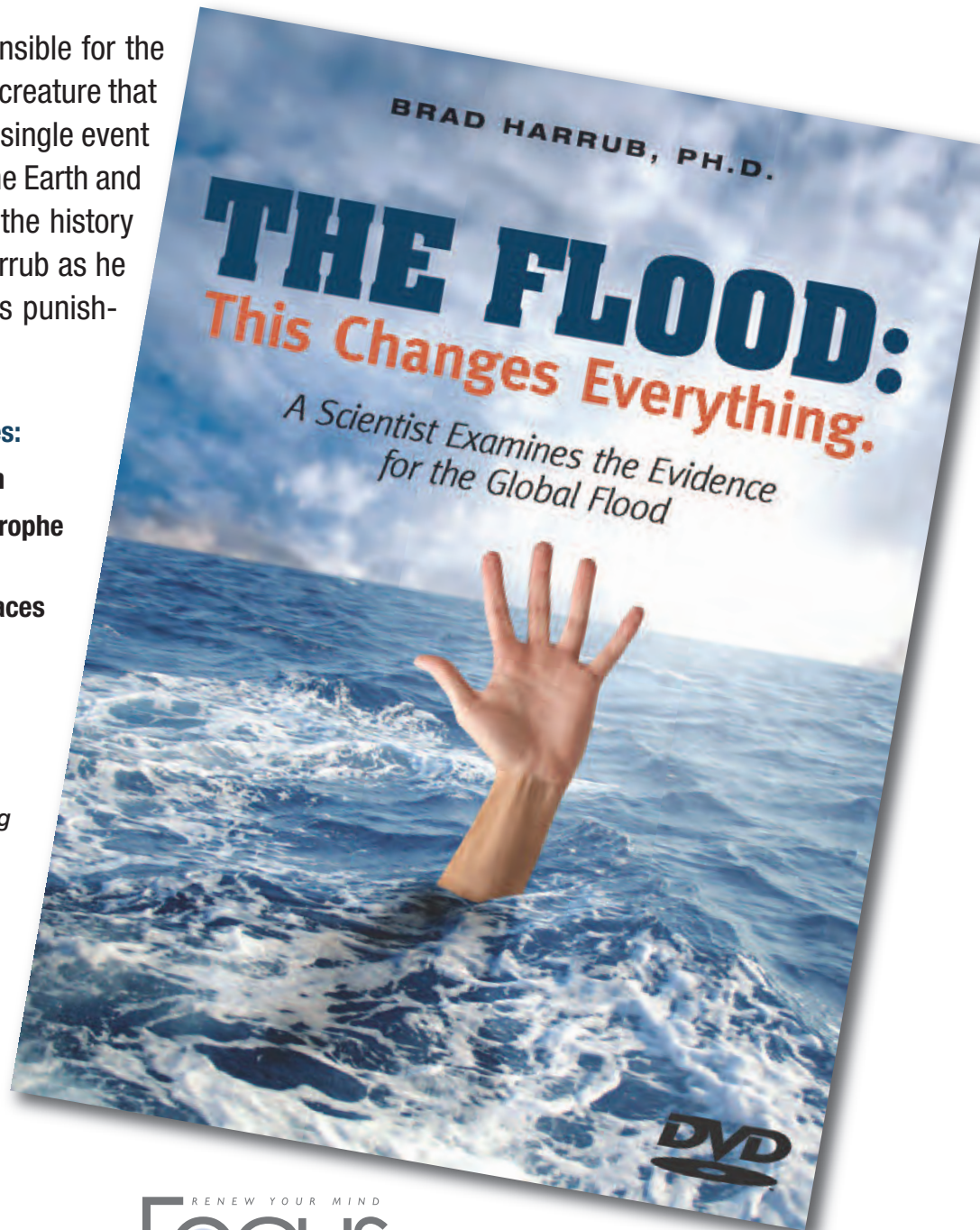
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FREEMASONRY CONSEQUENCES

This well-known passage (Galatians 1:6-10) has always been at the forefront of my thoughts, especially when studying with someone concerning the Word of God. Recently, I was confronted with a question that I could not give an answer, "Can a Christian be a Mason/Shriner?" My first reply was, "I hear they do good work and sponsor a circus for children throughout the country." This is the typical response of someone who knows nothing about the fraternal order. I asked the individual to give me a few days to study the topic and as soon as my research was completed, I would give an answer. After much study and interviews with both current and former members of Freemasonry, I was shocked to learn that the fraternal order is in direct contradiction with God's Holy Word.

Throughout the research, it was discovered that all who swear the oath of Masonry are swearing their allegiance and soul to a religious order, different from the one taught in the New Testament.

I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different Gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the Gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from Heaven, preach any other Gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other Gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed. For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ (Galatians 1:6-10).

Many Masons will argue that their Masonic Lodge is not a religious institution. However, Albert G. Mackey, 33rd degree Mason wrote in the *Lexicon of Freemasonry*, "All the ceremonies of our order are prefaced and terminated with prayer, because Masonry is a religious institution ..." (pg. 367). I encourage everyone to study the Freemason monitors of their state. In Tennessee, the Mason handbook is called the *Tennessee Craftsman*. Within the pages of the *Tennessee Craftsman*, you will become familiar with the rituals that the mason must go through in order to rise through the ranks or degrees. One degree of particular interest is the third degree—Master Mason. In order to become a Master Mason, he has to be symbolically buried and raised again in the name of Hiram Abiff. This is nothing more than a baptism and every Christian must know that there is only one baptism: "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Ephesians 4:5). I also encourage you to study and read the preface of any Masonic edition of the Holy Bible. In it you will find the foundational teachings of the masonic religion.

Unfortunately, when you confront the Mason they will become upset and tell you that the books you are referring to are not used in the lodges anymore and that it is not a religion or their lodge is a Christian lodge. From my interviews with current and past masons, these claims are untrue. Many enter the Masonic Lodge because they

would like to be a part of something that will help better their community. Very few, if any, have ever entered the lodge with the intent of separating themselves from the Lord. However, after the blood oaths are taken, by the way one stands with his feet and signs with his hands and speaks with his mouth, the separation from the Lord is immediate. Before whom do they swear these oaths? The man who wears the title, "Worshipful Master." Matthew 6:24 states, "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon." It saddens me that many Chris-

tians in my thoughts constantly. The man stated that the only reason he asked to join the lodge was because a fellow Christian man, whom he thought highly of, was a Mason. This man has since left the lodge and wishes that he had never been a member. He had no idea that in becoming a Mason that he would one day work his way up to the Knights Templar and be forced to drink red wine from a human skull. After that night, he left the lodge. In your study you will learn that the Knights Templar is the progression of the York Rite Mason while the Scottish Rite is the other branch of the Masons. And one must be a Third degree Master Mason before becoming a Shriner.

The fraternal order is in direct contradiction with God's Holy Word.

tian men have been led into the lodge, as well as Christian sisters into the Eastern Star, believing that they were becoming a part of something good but instead being trapped into something evil. These religious fraternal and/or maternal orders are said to be the way to the true light; however, they often meet in the darkness and always in secret. Christ is the only light that anyone should seek.

Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them. For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light. Therefore He says: "Awake, you who sleep, Arise from the dead, And Christ will give you light" (Ephesians 5:6-14).

If you are a Christian, I implore you to separate yourself from the Masonic Lodge and pray that God forgive you of your sins. Go forward and make public confession of this sin. Be open about this topic to others. Be willing to lead young men away from the Lodge and lead them to Christ. Out of several of the men I interviewed, one story re-

The men who confronted me with the question still practice Freemasonry and wish not to speak with me on this matter. I have lost friends and brothers and sisters in Christ over taking a stand against Freemasonry. I pray for them and pray that they may see the error of their way and turn from this sinful institution before it's too late. I also pray that they fail to influence any other brother into the Lodge. There are so many traps in this world that Satan has put in place to snare us. Please don't allow your membership in the Masonic Lodge to take your soul or that of another young man who may look to you as an example. Let us be examples who are not ashamed of Christ but are willing to live for Him. As Paul stated in Philippians 1:20-21, "According to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain." There is no greater fellowship on earth than the one a Christian shares with fellow Christians. Why would any **faithful Christian** want or need something more? "If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:6-7). May God bless you in this study and may you teach others the truth about the Masonic Lodge and help keep them away from this and other such fraternal organizations. ▲

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Can One Be Both a Faithful Christian and a Faithful Free Mason?

Max B. Murphy, Sr.—A Christian Brick Mason

Ido not think one can be a faithful Christian and a faithful Mason at the same time for the simple reason that the two are in opposition to each other. "Can two walk together except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3). Can one travel north and south at the same time? Can one be drunk and sober at the same time? How can one be for and against something at the same time? Remember our Lord said, "No man can serve two masters" (Matthew 6:24).

I have many friends and relatives who are Masons. One uncle once told me that he could take the Bible and prove that Jesus Christ was a Mason. I asked him to do so but he never did.

Some members of the Masonic Lodge will tell you that Freemasonry is not a religion. Others affirm that "it is a religion all its own." Some of their most noted and respected writers say that it is a religion. My father-in-law, F. A. Rapley, was a member of the Masonic lodge for a number of years. However, soon after he became a Christian, he applied for and received a demit from the lodge. He wrote a tract on Masonry and I will quote some from it. I will indicate those quotes with (F.A.R.).

In the Holman Masonic Bible, which most if not all lodges use, on page 27, the last paragraph under the heading "Concerning God And Religion," we find this statement, "The Bible is now so closely identified with the Lodge that, for Christian countries, it is one of the very few undisputed Landmarks of Freemasonry. Another is belief in God. These two essentials, belief in a Supreme Being and reverence for His Word, establish beyond question the character of the Fraternity as a religious institution." In Christian countries Masons use the Bible. Israelite Masons use the Pentateuch. Islamic Masons use the Koran and Hindu Masons use the Vedas (F.A.R.).

Now let us notice some of the many differences between the teachings of Freemasonry and the Bible. Space would forbid us from listing all the differences even if we were capable, but we will notice a few of them.

Masonry teaches, "Our ancient and honorable fraternity welcomes to its doors, and admits to its privileges to worthy men of all faiths and creeds who possess the indispensable qualifications." These qualifications are being a man, freeborn, sound in mind and members, and coming under the tongue of good report (F.A.R.). Christianity has no such limitations. Man, woman, or child, though

crippled, may through obedience become a Christian. Consider Matthew 11:28 and Revelation 22:17.

Freemasonry has leaders who are called Worshipful Master and even refer to themselves as such. However our Lord spoke against this in Matthew 23:8-10.

The Masonic lodge does not pray in the name of Jesus Christ. No doubt many of you have been to a Masonic funeral where the presiding officer prays the spirit of the deceased brother "into the celestial lodge above where the Supreme Architect of the universe presides" without the aid of Jesus Christ or anyone else (F.A.R.). And yet the Word of God is clear that we are to pray in the name of Christ (e.g. Colossians 3:17, John 14:6, etc.).

It is certainly true that Freemasons do much good. They engage in a host of good works and help many people. I remember hearing an old preacher of the Gospel many years ago on the subject of Masonry and he asked this thought-provoking question, "What good work can one do as a member of the Masonic Lodge that he could not do as a simple Christian?" The answer of course is not a one. ▲



Wayne Jackson

IS FREEMASONRY A RELIGIOUS INSTITUTION?

If all religious organizations are approved by God, it would seem that the more of them with which one might identify, the better off he would be. If on the other hand, the Lord honors only one redemptive organism—the church which He planned, and for which His Son died (Acts 20:28)—then it would follow that affiliation with any humanly-devised religion system would be at variance with the will of God.

Occasionally we are asked about the nature of Freemasonry (the Masonic Lodge). Is this institution merely an innocent fraternal organization that a Christian man might join with impunity? Or does it partake of a **religious** nature?

There are those—even some Christians—who argue that there is nothing intrinsically wrong with the Masonic Lodge. Any careful student of Masonry will discover, with thorough investigation, that the institution is highly religious. The following testimony from competent Masonic authorities will afford ample evidence of the religious character of this so-called “secret society.”

MASONIC TESTIMONY

Dr. Albert G. Mackey was perhaps the most recognized authority on Masonry ever to live. His monumental *Encyclopedia of Freemasonry* is a standard work among Masons. From this volume we quote:

I am not disposed to yield, on the subject of the religious character of Masonry, quite so much as has been yielded by more timid brethren. On the contrary, I contend, without any sort of hesitation, that Masonry is, in every sense of the word, except one, and that its least philosophical, an eminently religious institution—that it is indebted solely to the religious element which it contains for its origin and for its continued existence, and that without this religious element it would scarcely be worthy of cultivation by the wise and good (1874, p. 640).

Charles Albert Snodgrass, a 32 degree Mason, wrote: “Few Masons, if any, regardless of rank or station, ever learned very much of its profound philosophy, its religious meaning or faith, or its scientific and spiritual truths” (*Light From the Sanctuary of the Royal Arch*, pg. 9).

Mr. Snodgrass further affirmed that Masonry is “a fraternity teaching spiritual faith by allegory and moral science by symbols” (pg. 16). “Its purpose is to inculcate due reverence for Almighty God and true Brotherhood among men” (pg. 162). These quotations speak eloquently.

Another authority is even more explicit.

We are, therefore, inevitably driven to the conclusion that Masonry is not of human, but of divine origin Now, my brethren, let us realize that God is the author of our great and glorious institution, that its divine truths were revealed by Him to the earliest representatives of our race—that these God-given principles have been espoused and practiced in every age of the world, and that Masonry is infinite, eternal and spiritual, and that to be Masons in deed and in truth the spirit of Masonry must dwell within us, and dominate our lives” (*Taylor-Hamilton Monitor of Symbolic Masonry*, pg. 14, 20).

An issue of *The New Age* magazine, the official journal of Scottish Rite Masons, asserts that Masons “are taught to erect a Temple more durable than granite or marble—a Temple composed of living stones, a spiritual building, a house not made with hands, Eternal in the Heavens” (April 1953, pg. 228). A comparison of this quotation with 2 Corinthians 5:1 and 1 Peter 2:5 will reveal that the Masonic writer lifted his descriptions from the Bible.

Quotations such as these could be multiplied many times over. These are surely sufficient, however, to plainly establish that the leading scholars of the Masonic faith consider their system to be a religion, and no informed person can deny it.

MASONIC SYMBOLISM

Even without the foregoing confessions from Masonic authorities, a consideration of the multiple symbols that are a part of the fabric of Masonry would reveal the system’s religious essence.

The head of a local lodge is denominated the “Worshipful Master” (contrast with Matthew 23:8-10), and, among other officers, there is the Senior Deacon and Junior Deacon. Among “Christian” Masons, the Worshipful Master is a symbol of the Redeemer, Jesus Christ (Snodgrass, pg. 47).

There are 33 degrees in Masonry, beginning with the Entered Apprentice and culminating with the Sovereign Grand Inspector General. The first three degrees are known as Blue Lodge Masonry. These three degrees are very important, for as Snodgrass expresses it, this is “where we first saw the light” (pg. 40). Can you imagine a man, who has been a Christian for twenty years, joining the Masonic Lodge and confessing that here he “first saw the light”? How would such a confession reflect upon Colossians 1:13?

When the Mason attains the degree of Entered Apprentice, he is said to have passed from darkness into light. Upon receiving the second degree, it is affirmed that he has come from ignorance into knowledge (*Tennessee Craftsman*, pg. 38). Again we ask, how could a child of God participate in such a mockery of Scripture?

The third degree of Masonry, known as the Master Mason, is based upon the alleged murder of Hiram Abiff, a citizen of ancient Phoenicia, who was a contemporary of King Solomon of Israel.

According to the Old Testament, the king of Tyre sent Hiram to assist Solomon in building the temple. Masonic tradition alleges that Solomon, the king of Tyre, and Hiram entered into a solemn agreement never to reveal the mysterious Master’s secret “word” (a password), until the temple was completed. Supposedly, this word was the true name of God! As the Masonic story goes, one day, before the completion of the temple, Hiram was attacked by three knaves who demanded to know the hidden word. When he refused to tell it, Hiram was murdered. In the Masonic ceremony, the Worshipful Master, playing the role of Solomon, will raise Hiram (played by the candidate) from the dead, using a secret handshake designated as the “strong grip of the lion’s paw,” and then administer to him the “five points of fellowship.”

But the Masonic story contradicts genuine Bible history. In the Old Testament, the record is clear that Hiram **finished** the work he was assigned to do on the temple (see 1 Kings 7:40; 2 Chronicles 4:11). He was not killed earlier—as Masonic legend has the story.

The Masonic lodge room usually is located on an upper floor since high places are holy and peculiarly appropriate for religious purposes (*Tennessee Craftsman*, pg. 19). The lodge room is sup-

posed to represent the universe while the covering of the lodge is symbolic of Heaven “where all good Masons hope at last to arrive” (*Tennessee Craftsman*, pg. 21)—including Jewish Masons, Muslim Masons, etc. How could a Christian ever endorse such error?

The Masonic symbol, containing the square, the compass, and the letter *G* is a further example of the religious symbolism of Masonry. The compass signifies “faith” and the square “reason” (Snodgrass, pg. 28). The *G* stands for Geometry; ultimately it is a reference to the “Grand Geometrician of the universe” (Mackey, pg. 302), namely, God. The compass is set at 60 degrees, making an equilateral triangle, which is considered “sacred” (*New Age*, pg. 209).

The Masonic apron, which is worn at ceremonies, funerals, etc., measures approximately 14 inches wide by 12 inches deep. It is white (emblematic of innocence and purity) and is made of lamb’s skin, which also represents innocence (Mackey, pg. 302). Upon receiving the apron, Masons are told: “If you wear it without soil or blemish, you will be received at the pearly gates of Heaven and there be presented with the pure white robe of righteousness, which will glisten in brightness, increasing in glory even unto the perfect day” (*Tennessee Craftsman*, pg. 60). Such a sentiment ignores the requirements of the Gospel and reflects a disregard for Biblical truth.

Additional evidence of the religious import of Freemasonry is seen in the rites of Masonic Baptism and Communion. “‘Masonic baptism’ is simply a lustration or purification by water, a ceremony which was common to all the ancient initiations” (Mackey, pg. 107). What sort of “purification” would one need to seek through Masonry that is not found in the redemptive system of Jesus Christ?

Concerning Masonic Communion, Mackey writes:

Consecrated bread and wine, that is to say, bread and wine used not simply for food, but made sacred by the purpose of symbolizing a bond of brotherhood, and the eating and drinking of which are sometimes called the “Communion of the Brethren,” is found in some of the higher degrees, such as the Order of High Priesthood in the American Rite (pg. 126).

CONCLUSION

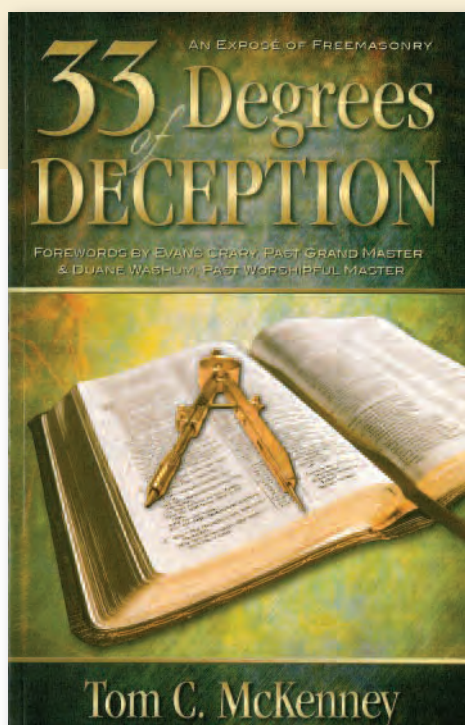
Is it possible that an honest reader could survey the foregoing material and not see that the Masonic system is eminently a religious institution, and, as such, stands in clear conflict with Christianity?

No Christian should ever consider becoming a Mason. And while many, no doubt, have joined themselves to this body with genuine sincerity, not realizing the religious nature of the organism, any Christian who holds membership in this entity should abandon it. True Christianity does not permit such compromise. ▲

We invite our readers to check out more of Wayne’s articles on www.Christian-courier.com.

DEGREES OF DECEPTION

Lt. Col. Tom C. McKenney graduated from the University of Kentucky and the University of North Carolina. He served in the U.S. Marine Corps in both Korea and Vietnam. He is an advocate for American Prisoners of War and has written several articles and books. He authored a book titled *33 Degrees of Deception* in which he exposed some of the deadly deception behind Freemasonry. We were able to interview Tom regarding their practices and the truth.



Focus Press: Tom, please share with our readers a little bit of background about yourself and how you came to the knowledge of the practices of freemasonry.

Tom McKenney: I never had the slightest interest in Freemasonry until about 1975; I did have some vague idea that the Masons were the gung-ho Protestants and the Knights of Columbus were the gung-ho Catholics. About the former, I could not have been more wrong.

In 1975 my family and I were trying to lead a young druggie out of the darkness and into the Kingdom, and one night he came to see me with a little blue book in his hand. He said that he had a secret book, that he wasn't supposed to have it, but he had found it in his grandfather's attic. He said there was some "very heavy stuff" in it. He said that he had been reading it, and he wanted me to read it. I didn't want to read it; but, to please him, because he was so fragile, I promised to read at least the Introduction. I did and was astonished! The little book was *The Kentucky Monitor*, the handbook for the Blue Lodge, the 1st three degrees of Freemasonry. In the Introduction I read, "Every civilization has had its myth of a Messiah; the belief was general that he was to be born of a virgin and suffer a painful death; the Hindus called him Krisna, the Chinese called him Kiountse, the Persians called him Sosiosch . . . (others), the Christian's [Messiah is] Jesus, and the Mason's [Messiah is] Hiram." I said to myself, if the Mason's Messiah isn't Jesus, but is instead some guy named Hiram, I want to know who this Hiram is!" It launched me into a study of Masonry that has gone on for 36 years.

FP: For those who are unfamiliar with freemasonry, can you give a summary of what this organization believes and practices?

TM: Freemasonry teaches the ancient mystery religions, primarily the Egyptian mysteries, i.e. the worship of Isis and Osiris. Of course, it is disguised in Biblical terms in the Blue Degrees (1st, 2nd and 3rd, or Master Mason Degree), which is as far as most Masons go. But, as you can see, if a Mason reads only the introduction to his own *Monitor* (there is one for every state and territory), he can't miss it; in the *Kentucky Monitor* the passage I just quoted is on pg. xi. Masonry teaches that Jesus was not the only way to Heaven but was just one of the many great religious leaders of the past. The secret of salvation, as in all of the mystery religions, is knowledge—a lifetime search for enlightenment. In fact, it all means that Masonry is the way to Heaven (*Kentucky Monitor*, pg. xxi).

Distilled, Masonry teaches: salvation by works—you don't need a savior; the Bible is just one of the "holy books" no more important than the Koran, Hindu Vedas, or the Book of Mormon; Jesus was just one of the "Exemplars," i.e. the great teachers of the past, no more important than Confucius, Mohammed, or Buddha. In light of this, it astounds me that so many Southern Baptist preachers are Masons.

FP: Please share why and how men join the Masons, and what are the good things that come from this organization?

TM: To join, a man must apply, usually by asking a friend who becomes his sponsor. They claim that the system is “2 B 1, Ask 1” (a common bumper sticker), i.e. that you must ask (they won’t ask you). The reality is that they recruit and, as their numbers shrink, they recruit ever more aggressively.

Why do men join? Most men join for some benefit—political, business, social—although they must say that they don’t in the 1st Degree initiation. Many join in order to “belong,” i.e. for social fulfillment. A small minority joins looking for religious fulfillment; Jim Shaw, the subject of Part I of my book, wanted to find God.

The good things? Viewed objectively, there is very little good that comes from belonging. There is a lot of social activity, and friends are made; but those “friends” shun a man who leaves the lodge. Shriners are famous for their children’s hospitals; but most of the money raised for them goes to other uses, including their notoriously drunken, rowdy conventions. Masons are told that Masonry is “based upon the Bible;” it isn’t—it is based on the Kaballa (variously spelled), a medieval occult interpretation of the Old Testament. Likewise they are told that if they are Christians, it will make them better Christians; but it has the opposite effect. A common saying among Masons is “The Lodge is a good enough religion for me.”

FP: Almost everyone who has heard of the Masons is aware that they have some secret rites and customs. Why the secrecy?

TM: Secrecy is one of the things that appeal to prospects; they like the thought of being in on something that “ordinary” people (in official Freemasonry, a non-Mason is “profane”) can’t know. Secrecy is the bedrock doctrine of Masonry. Albert Mackey, one of Masonry’s greatest authorities, wrote, “If divested of its secret character . . . it would cease to be Masonry.” He also wrote, “As a secret association Masonry has lived unchanged for centuries; as an open society it would not last for as many years.”

FP: In 1988 you wrote a book titled *The Deadly Deception* in which you recounted the firsthand experience of James D. Shaw. Jim was made a Knight Commander of the Court of Honor. What caused him to start questioning the practices of Freemasons?

TM: The Reverend Jim Shaw was that rare item—a man utterly and completely dedicated to Masonry; in it, he believed he had found the family he had never had and the God he had searched for all of his life. Masonry was the center and purpose in his life. The ophthalmologist to whom he went for cataract surgery was a bold Christian who witnessed to Jim. It made Jim mad, but eventually the doctor led him to the Lord. Jim began to ask questions of other Masons who could not answer him satisfactorily; a dark, demonic ritual over which he presided finally drove him out of the Masonic system.

FP: What is the deadly deception that you mention in your book?

TM: The deception that is so deadly is the entire Masonic system, which proclaims that it is based on the Bible and will lead men to God, when in reality it is a spiritual death-trap which deceives good men into participating in Christ-denying paganism with horrible, bloody death oaths. In the Shrine, the horrible oath is taken, “In the name of Allah, the God of the Arab, Muslim and Mohammedan, and the God of our fathers . . .”

FP: Would you describe Freemasonry as a religion?

TM: Yes, Freemasonry is a religion, a latter-day revival of the phallic religion of Isis and Osiris.

FP: What is the apron ceremony at the death of a Freemason all about?

TM: The Mason is taught that the apron is a symbol of purity, that he “is without sin,” i.e. redeemed and on his way to Heaven. In reality, it is an occult sexual symbol lifted from paganism concerning the “kundolini force”—sexual power.

FP: If someone were considering joining the Masons, what would you tell them?

TM: If I knew someone who is considering joining the Masons, I would tell him not to listen only to what Masons tell him; what Masons will tell him are lies, but they believe that they are true. The only true thing they will tell him is that it will help him to advance and be promoted in certain settings. I would urge such a man to arm himself with the facts by reading a good Christian book on the subject; and I can say sincerely that I don’t know a better, or more complete, one than *33 Degrees of Deception*. There are other such books, good ones; but none other is complete. And it can’t be dismissed as “anti-Masonic” because in my book there are 392 endnotes and internal references to the authority for my statements, and they are all quotations from Freemasonry’s most revered authorities. There is **not one single** “anti-Masonic” source quoted in the entire book, unless we count the Bible, which they profess to follow. ▲

PARTY TIME?

Brad Harrub, Ph.D.



One of the fastest growing trends among young people today is “cutting”—purposefully taking a blade or sharp instrument to the skin to cut it open. The object is not suicide, as these cuts are normally not too deep. Those who intentionally cut themselves indicate that they injure themselves because they believe it will help them cope better. These young people declare that they are desperate to want to feel something and to be in control. Simply put, they feel the world they are growing up in has left them behind.

This strong emotion rings true in their music as well. For instance, Linkin Park, a well-known alternative rock group, has sold millions of albums with lyrics that reach out to this crowd. One very popular song says: “I wanna heal, I wanna feel what I thought was never real. I wanna let go of the pain I’ve felt so long. (Erase all the pain till it’s gone). I wanna heal, I wanna feel like I’m close to something real. I wanna find something I’ve wanted all along, somewhere I belong (Somewhere I belong).” Another Linkin Park song titled “In the End” declares, “I tried so hard and got so far, but in the end it doesn’t even matter. I had to fall to lose it all, but in the end it doesn’t even matter.” These words have reverberated through the ear buds of untold millions of young people. Their album Hybrid Theory sold over 11 million copies (legally). That means one out of every nine students has this album.

While we can debate whether groups like Linkin Park, Eminem, and Rhianna are musically talented, the fact remains that these artists are portraying a very nihilistic message to our children. Sure, you may find a song without curse words in the lyrics, but what message are they sending to Christian young people? They convey the sense that everything is bad and there is no real meaning or purpose to life.

Now we could all smash our children’s iPods, have a CD burning down at the local church building, and preach, “You are not to listen to such music.” However, before we start screaming about such horrible music, Christian parents need to pause and ask this question: What is it about these songs that resonate so strongly in the minds of teens? Why are they so drawn to this nihilistic message?

The bottom line is that all young people want purpose and meaning to their lives. They are craving to know why they are here and what they should be doing with their lives. Well, it is time we as Christian parents stand before our children and apologize. Because ultimately it should have been Mom and Dad who boldly teach the purpose of life and instruct our children as to why life has meaning. It should have been Mom and Dad who invested time into their children to demonstrate what is important and why we are here. But the reality is, for several generations, we didn’t do this. And as a result, we are now reaping the fruit. Our children have left our homes and gone off to college longing for a place to belong and a sense of purpose.

And where do they turn to fulfill these needs? Unfortunately, not the New Testament church.

Normally by the very first week in college, students are introduced to fraternities and sororities. Allow me to ask a question: Is it possible we have become more Americanized than we are Christian? Do we even question this path, since that is what Americans do—we go to college and join a frat.

Webster’s dictionary defines fraternity as “a group of people associated or formally organized for a common purpose, interest, or pleasure: a men’s student organization formed chiefly for social purposes having secret rites and a name con-

THE BOTTOM LINE IS THAT ALL YOUNG PEOPLE WANT PURPOSE AND MEANING TO THEIR LIVES.

sisting of Greek letters.” A sorority is defined in a similar fashion, with the difference being these organizations are strictly for women.

While the object of this article is not to point out all of the immoral activity that surrounds fraternities, an honest evaluation reveals there is a darkness that Christians need not be associated with. While we don’t like generalizations, alcohol and pre-marital sex is rampant in many Greek organizations. Add to this that the majority of fraternities and sororities have ritualistic meetings with secret passwords and handshakes and you get the picture quickly that this is not something faithful Christians need to be involved with.

I can already hear some saying: “Is this guy saying fraternities are evil?” No, not all “Greek” organizations are evil or wrong (e.g., Phi Beta Kappa honor society; Sigma Xi research society; Phi Mu Alpha men’s music society). But in looking at fraternities and sororities Christians should start with the obvious question: Why?

Far too often the conscious or subconscious answer for young people is “to belong.” And so our sons and daughters build an allegiance with this “group” and start doing things together. Frats also allow for a doorway to immorality for young people that they may not find with other groups. [Of course there will also be dues to pay and required meetings to attend.] They share the secret handshake and the secret rites. While no social club or fraternity would admit to hazing, it is clear that RUSH week and initiations are just a way of life. Soon those Greek letters start showing up on everything. Our allegiance to a particular club is embroidered onto t-shirts, pillows, curtains, and even backpacks. We even recognize others and ourselves by those Greek letters (e.g., “I’m dating a Delta Kappa.”)

One lesson that God has made very clear is that He demands our allegiance. He does not want our leftovers. In Deuteronomy 6, the same chapter that instructs parents how to teach their children, we read: “You shall fear the Lord your God and serve Him, and shall take oaths in His name. You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are all around you, (for the Lord your God is a jealous God among you), lest the anger of the Lord your God be aroused against you and destroy you from the face of the earth” (Deuteronomy 6: 13-15). In Exodus 20:3-5 we read, “You

shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an image on the form of anything in heaven or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God.” Notice God does not give exceptions. He doesn’t say, “Well, since this is a popular Greek fraternity it will be okay.” The Bible does not teach that Christians should be exclusive or belong to groups that are exclusive. Are we told to go into all the world and make disciples, or just the go unto all the Sigma Kappa’s?

Unfortunately, many Christians have forgotten that we are called to be different from the world (Romans 12:1-2). We think, “What will it hurt”? After all, many parents were in fraternities or sororities. And just think of how proud we would be if our children were in the same one. Many parents don’t even consider the history of Greek organizations and what the Greek influence has done to many nations. Sadly, we have parents who are more defensive of their Greek organizations than they are the Lord’s church.

Parents and teens would do well to consider the difference between the church and a fraternity or sorority. Anyone who chooses can obey the Gospel (and is added to the church). However, fraternities and sororities are immoral, selective, and exclusive. The cost to you to be a Christian? The blood of Christ paid your debt. The cost to be in a fraternity? Whatever the dues are that particular year.

But you say, “It’s okay because these groups do community service. I’ve even seen them cleaning up parks and having blood drives.” Using that logic, is it okay for someone to be in a gang as long as they do some community service? When James was defining pure religion he was communicating to the church—not some Greek organization: “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world” (James 1:27). This is a command to Christians, not members of an exclusive club. Did you catch the last portion of the text, “to keep oneself unspotted from the world”?

Some might argue that this is a good way for us to meet people and socialize. However, using this same logic someone could argue that going to a bar is a good way to meet people and socialize. In Proverbs 12:26 we read, “The righteous should choose his friends carefully, for the way of the wicked leads them astray” (Proverbs 12:26). Do we really want our children thinking they need to pay for their friends? And most importantly, would Jesus Christ join a fraternity and exclude Himself from others? As Christians, we need to prayerfully consider where our allegiance really lies. For those still thinking what is the harm, the Proverbs writer said it best:

“Can a man take fire to his bosom, and his clothes not be burned? Can one walk on coals, and his feet not be seared?” (Proverbs 6:27-28). Why play with fire when you can experience a joyful Christian life without ever joining an exclusive fraternity? ▲



MARRIAGE?

I thought I had heard just about everything! I was truly amazed when we, as a country, began to debate same-sex marriage. I could not believe that a country founded on Christian principles (and we were) could ever sink so low as to even think about marriage being anything but one man and one woman. Well, yesterday, on the radio, I got another jolt. There are bills up in 5 states to allow multiple marriages, both polygamy and polyandry. At this point, polyandry only means to have one of one sex and two of the other all living together. The “talking point” is that, if three adults agree to live in this arrangement, the government has no right to hinder them. The ACLU is backing this, of course. I guess since we now think nothing of couples “living together” (we used to call that “shacking up”), we should not be surprised at anything some might think up.

The big question is, what does God say about this? Has He told us what He would approve of and what He would disapprove of? Does it matter what God thinks? Does it matter if we do it His way or not?

First of all, it matters a great deal. The Bible clearly tells us that if we do not obey God, He will not save us in the end. If we are disobedient, our ultimate destination is not Heaven but Hell. (Yes, there is a Hell, and many will go there; but that is another article.) God has chosen the obedient to go to Heaven, and it is our choice whether or not we want to be in that group. A good example of this would be in reference to how we view marriage. We may be partakers of the heavenly reward in that we have obeyed God.

You know, I have said this before, and I now emphasize it again. Do not risk your soul on what I or any other human may tell you is God’s will. The only way to be sure of Heaven is to read God’s Word yourself and be sure what the Scriptures say. Therefore, I urge you to read this article, then to investigate the Scriptures used in your own Bible. Also, be sure your Bible is a translation, not a paraphrase.

In the beginning, God created only one man. After that man had named all the animals and had an opportunity to see that none of them were what he needed as his life’s companion, God created one woman (Genesis 2:18-24). Please note that there was one man and one woman. Had God not intended this to be the pattern, surely He would have made His first choice different from the beginning. Later, in the seventh generation from Adam through Cain, Lamech broke the divine pattern and had two wives ... the first recorded instance of polygamy (Genesis 4:19).

Yes, it is true that many of our Biblical “heroes” had multiple wives ... Jacob, David, and Solomon to name a few. If you remember those stories, they all ended in confusion. Jacob’s wives competed to please him, and his favorite son was sold into slavery (Genesis 37:3; Genesis 37:18-28). David had rebellion from his own son, Absalom (2 Samuel 15:1-6). And the wives and concubines of Solomon caused him to turn aside and to worship idols (1 Kings 11:1-8). None of this was pleasing to the Lord.

What about the New Testament? God has never sanctioned polygamy. Jesus Himself restored God’s purpose for marriage as being between one man and one woman in Matthew 19:1-6. This reading clearly shows that marriage is between one man and one woman. Jesus sanctioned no other arrangement. Paul, in the same manner, leaves no room for variation in 1 Corinthians 7:2, 1 Corinthians 9:5, and Ephesians 5:23. (If the Lord is head of the church, can He have two or more bodies? That’s nonsense!)

We can argue and debate “times and customs” all we want to, but it does not profit us anything if we are arguing against God. God has set the rule at one man and one woman. If we deviate from this, regardless of what is the current worldly fashion, we have offended God, and that will lead us not to Heaven but to Hell.

I am sure some will not agree with this article. Be sure that you are arguing against the Bible and not against me. Read the Scriptures. Study on your own. ▲

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**END OF LIFE
DECISIONS**

PURSuing PEACE: RESOLVING CONFLICTS IN THE BODY OF CHRIST

Life within the body of Christ should be the most rewarding existence that any person might experience. The church is to be a place of security, support, love, and loyalty. For those in the church we should all feel more at peace than at any other time in our lives, for when we are together, we receive a brief and faded glimpse of what eternal glory will be like—all the saints in unity and praise toward God.

Because the church is “not of this world” and so multi-faceted in its function and purposes, the Lord has chosen to describe it with a number of different pictures that we might better understand its vast character. We see it as an “army,” keeping the faith against the armies of Satan. The image of a “body” is clear to us, showing Christ’s great authority and the importance of every member. We know ourselves as Jesus’ “bride,” and thereby see His fervent love toward us all. But perhaps the most vivid picture we encounter in Scripture is the image of the church as a spiritual “family.”

Families are something everyone understands. We all have some family members we adore and others we tolerate. The common blood that pumps through our veins may bind us together, but that bond is not always harmonious. In like manner, “siblings” in the “household of faith” will sometimes bicker and often not see eye to eye, but the question is, “Do we still behave like a family?”

The cold reality is that we do sometimes have strife within the church, and occasionally it does become quite bitter. When Christians agree, our “family” can quickly become “dysfunctional” if brethren do not apply certain principles to govern their conflicts. Therefore, when we begin to feel the temperature rise and emotions fly, we must examine how we are responding to the problem **before** it becomes out of control.

IS THE PROBLEM A PETTY ONE?

Before we go any farther, it is important to do an honest evaluation of our feelings. Why am I so upset? Is the offense really a big deal, or has my pride inflated the whole issue? Is this something a **mature** Christian would be upset about?

How many times are our grievances childish? We have observed conflicts from the outside that seem so silly, yet the participants are utterly blinded by their own anger and feelings. How many splits, fights, divisions, and lost relationships could have been saved, if only we could have said, “this is no big deal” and simply let it go?

REALIZE THAT ANGER AND HATE ARE ALWAYS MY PROBLEM

Whenever we are offended, how often do we sit back and examine our emotions? Yes, anger is sometimes justified, but when does anger make the ugly transformation into hate? Consider the words of Jesus: “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder, and whoever

murders will be in danger of the judgment.’ But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment” (Matthew 5:21-22).

When the vengeful feelings come upon us, we generally feel justified. Our pride feeds the fire with thoughts like, “You didn’t deserve that,” or, “How dare he . . .,” which may or may not be true. Pride inflames the situation and causes us to feel, do, and say things we normally would know were wrong, but in the heat of our rage, they feel so right!

The challenge in these moments of anger is to step back, examine our emotions, and conform our thoughts to the will of Christ. Be it counting to ten, leaving the room, or any other method necessary, we must not allow rage to transform into hatred. Anger may have its place, but what anger often becomes, never does.

IF THERE IS STILL A LEGITIMATE HURT, GO TO THE BROTHER

If one determines that the offense is not a petty concern and has worked through the emotions so that he is calm and composed, he should take the step commanded by Christ and go to the brother (Matthew 18:15-17). This process leaves no room for gossip, for this loving confrontation is the **first step** one takes, after working through the problem in his mind. We go with the sole aim of **resolving** the conflict and the hope of complete restoration of relationship.

This means that our motivation must never be to “get in the last word” or “show him what for.” Our approach must be in humility. Through prayer and reflection, one should have already dealt with temper so that shouting and harsh words have no room to take root.

GO QUICKLY

How soon must these conflicts be dealt with? Without question, they must be handled swiftly. Unaddressed hurts breed anger, which can breed hatred, which can destroy a person’s faith. If every problem were addressed immediately, long-term relational rifts would often be avoided entirely.

What if you have no problem with a fellow Christian, but he seems to have a problem with you? Do you wait for him to work through this process, and sit back until he approaches you? The reality is that he may never come to you, and if you do not take the initiative, your brotherly relationship may be jeopardized forever. Go to him. Go to him right away, and your initiative and concern will speak volumes as you mend whatever wounds lie between you.

We are to be a loving and nurturing family. Christ has called us to bear one another’s burdens and offer one another a safe haven in an inhospitable world. And although conflicts will most assuredly arise at times, we can resolve them quickly in humility and show the world that we truly are one in Christ. ▲

"What difference does it make? I'm one of many. It doesn't matter." Has that thought ever run through your head? It's that nagging notion that sits at the edge of our minds calling out to us, reminding us why our lives are ultimately insignificant.

Right around the fifth century A.D., there lived a man who was just another voice in the crowd (a crowd of approximately 50,000). His name would have never been imprinted upon the pages of history were it not for his courage and willingness to be the one person to take a stand. Telemachus, a European monk, was the catalyst who brought about the end of an era. This particular era was riddled by gruesome deaths, with the most treacherous part of all being that it was considered outstanding entertainment. It was a sick and twisted time. On a bleak day in the early 400s, Telemachus joined the multitudes as they poured into the Coliseum. As the "games" began, he was mortified, so much so that he actually leapt into the arena and attempted to stop the vicious athletes known as gladiators. There he stood between two men wielding weapons set on fighting to the death. In an outrage, the bloodthirsty spectators stoned the humble monk. When Honorius,

JUST ANOTHER VOICE IN THE CROWD?



emperor of Rome at the time, learned of the brutal death of Telemachus, he forever ended the gladiatorial spectacle. What might have happened if this gentle sir had simply walked away? What if he had thought, "This is a heart-wrenching event and **someone** ought to put a stop to it. I wish I could do something, but I'm just one man." Where might the world be now? Isn't it a blessing that we don't have to know?

Dear friends, Satan wants us to believe that we are wholly inadequate. If he can simply convince us that what we do or don't do makes no difference, he has us exactly where he wants us: useless and doused in apathy to keep us there. But we know Satan is the father of lies (John 8:44b). Apathy's biggest attack comes through a whisper. We hear the devil's conniving words, "Someone else will do it. There's no need for you to have to put out that effort." In truth,

apathy is often another word for laziness. Come Judgment Day, the last thing we will want to be likened to is the "wicked, lazy slave" who buried his talent (Matthew 25:26).

Have you ever heard the saying, "10 percent of the church members do all the work"? Well, as much as we hate to admit it, it's true. Our heads are filled with notions such as, "Mrs. Smith just had surgery, but I know that the ladies who are closer to her will take her meals. I'm sure they have got it covered." Or perhaps, "I know I needed to call our congressman and ask him to oppose that abortion bill, but I'm sure that there are several thousand other people in the state that already have. I just don't have time." Maybe even, "I'd love to help out that family whose house just burned down, but I know the community has reached out and given. Besides, I'm saving up for that new car." How would your life be altered if you ran every motive through the filter, "What if every other person acted like me?" Honestly, what would happen? Would Mrs. Smith get a single meal? Would even one righteous soul call to oppose that abortion bill? Would the family who lost their home remain utterly destitute? Now, on the flip side of that, think of the most dedicated, servant-hearted Christian you know. How would the entire world be affected if we all acted as they do? Friends, the church would be uplifted (1 Thessalonians 5:11, 14), justice would be upheld (Micah 6:8) and great progress would be made to win the lost for Christ. In truth, our life is just a vapor (James 4:14) and our time here on earth will only be as significant as we allow God to make it (Romans 8:15-17, 37). Telemachus died for what he believed in, but he saved many. No one is asking you to literally die. However, if you arose every morning dedicated to dying to self, just imagine what could be accomplished in our world. You may be one of a million, but how many of those million could you positively affect if you gave your all in allowing God to work through you? Would you have Isaiah's attitude of "Here am I. Send me!" (Isaiah 6:8)? We **can** change the world, one person at a time.

"For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline . . ." (2 Timothy 1:7-10). ▲

Snow White AND THE Seven-Car Pile Up



I just don't pay attention. It's not that weather isn't interesting to me—it's just **talking** about the weather that is not particularly interesting to me. So if it's the weather segment on one channel or something like "The Thirty-seventh Annual Houston Fishing Tournament" on the other, I'm suddenly all about catching bass. My husband is the opposite. He's just got to know. It's as if somehow by knowing what the approximate temperature will be next Thursday, everything in his world will be fine.

We live in a circus where trapeze acts are performed at random from the dining room chairs and used-to-be chandeliers, ping-pong balls cross the path at breakneck speeds, and surprise concerts pop up which make Woodstock look like a piano recital, so hearing a news program at all is a near-miracle. My husband runs upstairs to hear what Dan the Weatherman has to report in peace and quiet as if this has ever worked before. He's soon joined by the rest of us, raucous and unrefined as ever, but threatened within an inch of our lives not to breathe too loudly or we'll never be invited to watch the news again. This is met with great cheers and one stern look.

I've tried to actually watch a couple of times, but get this—there's this map that shows what's supposed to happen in our area, and the guy stands right in front of it! Plus, is everyone else pretending to know what's going on, or does someone actually understand the Doppler weather forecast thing? Okay, my kids have done science experiments about Doppler, and it has consisted of things like the pitch and frequency of train horns and rippling water effects, but not once have arbitrarily shaped colorful splotches danced around on a map of the United States.

So it's no surprise that I'm usually caught in a torrential rainstorm with nothing to cover my head but a used napkin, or that I find myself freezing in the tent in shorty pajamas on a spring camping trip and burning up in long johns on a fall hiking one. Who else but me would have been giving the SAT in the church school on April 27, the day of eleven F-4 and F-5 Alabama tornadoes, all the while wondering why we had so many people I had never seen before inundate our building at once and head down the stairs? So imagine my perplexity when I stand in the dairy section at the grocery store after a run on milk and eggs. I guess I'm the only one asking if the farmers are on strike.

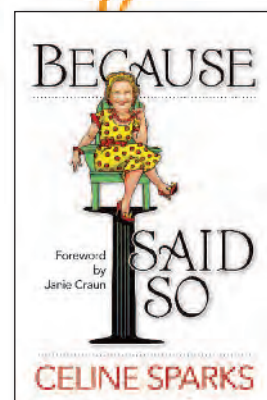
I don't even get that. It's an unwritten law that is far more closely followed than any written one in history. If there is snow in the forecast in Alabama, head to the grocery store and buy as much milk, eggs, and bread as you can fit in your trunk. I don't understand. Even the lactose-intolerant and the no-carbs dieters are hoarding milk and bread like free Superbowl tickets. So what happens next? Is there a French toast festival? It's the only food I can think of that has these three ingredients solely. And yet I nev-

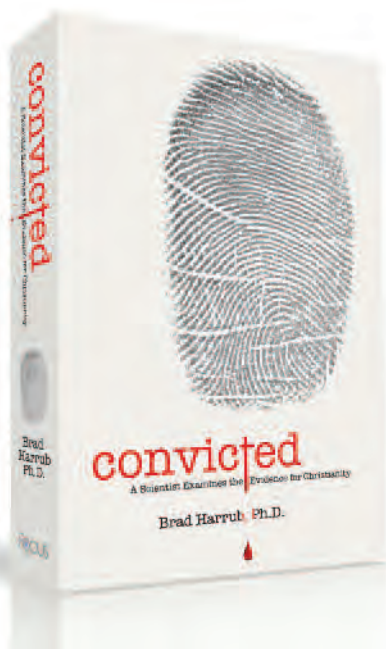
er hear anyone say, "We were snowed in, but I'm just thankful we had plenty of French toast." The deal is if we're going to have snow and ice, we usually are going to lose power and we end up having to throw out the milk and eggs we already have, and we can forget about any French toast unless we can make it on the Coleman grill, which is not a big hit indoors. So I usually just shrug at the empty milk shelves and head for the Chips Ahoy which are a great deal more fun and practical.

Fun and practical—that's what snow is in the South. It's really not enough to throw your life out of kilter (though some people can have a seven-car pile-up in the drive on the way to the mailbox), but it's enough to have fun just when we need a break the most. Schools dismiss before we're really sure if that was a snowflake or just the principal's dandruff, and we head outside for winter fun on a plain that is more brown grass than white snow. We pile a combined three hundred twenty pounds on an upside-down garbage can lid, and expect to go gliding down an incline. We end up pushing, grunting, rowing with our bare hands until they are frostbit, all to no avail before hopping up to throw snowballs, which again more resemble clumpy grass balls. This is when the southern snowman is born, only he's usually a woman because there is not near enough snow to form a ball that would support another one, so the snow is scraped up to form a mound of a skirt instead. On top of this sits a softball-sized head, and the entire structure makes our cat look like Godzilla, but we take pictures and post on Facebook as if it were a contender for the ice sculpting finals.

Life sits still for a moment, and the Lord knew it was what we needed. When we lived in a south Mississippi town on the Louisiana border, talk of forecasted snow spread like the measles, and officials did the only thing they knew to do—they closed down the mall. We may not know how to deal with it like they do the other side of the Mason-Dixon Line. We don't have sleds in stock in our hardware stores, and so we make do with cafeteria trays and occasionally a recliner. And we don't know about the smog in the big cities that prevents you from making snow cream from the top layer on the mini-van. We just get out the biggest bowl in the cabinet, mix it with milk, and ...

Oh, so that's why the shelves at the grocery store were empty. ▲





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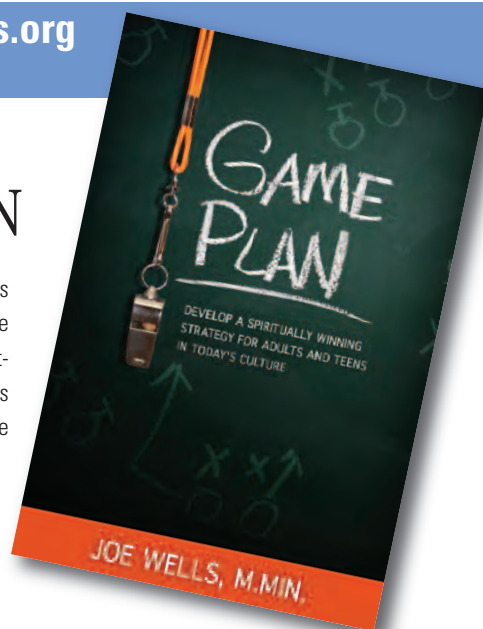
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In these articles, we'll look at some study tips for one book/epistle each month. The study tips will include key themes, verses, and words along with some background information. I hope you'll study these books with me each month, and if you have any thoughts you would like to share on any of the studies, email me at jack@focuspress.org.

OF THE SAME MIND

PHILIPPIANS

In a culture that boldly teaches the “all-about-me” lifestyle, it’s helpful to look back to the Biblical model to see the attitude God wants us to have toward ourselves and to those around us. Philippians is probably the best book in the New Testament when looking at that subject, as Paul wrote about our need to place others above ourselves. The result of such self-sacrifice is the joy that comes from being united in one purpose and one mind.

BACKGROUND INFO

Paul wrote this epistle from prison, as evidenced by 1:13. He was at Rome, as we can see from the fact that he was with the saints from Caesar’s household (4:22). This would date the letter in the early 60s. Of course, Paul had helped bring the church to Philippi on his second missionary journey, documented in Acts 16. From his wording, he clearly felt a very close connection with the brethren he was writing to. They had also supported him on multiple occasions (4:15-18), so he clearly had a rather personal interest in helping them fix the problems they were experiencing.

KEY THEMES

While many point to joy as the main theme of Paul’s writing (as he used “joy” seven times and “rejoice” another eight), that theme comes as a side to his main point, which is unity. Joy is made complete in our unity of mind and spirit (2:2). In achieving that unity, we must defer to one another and be willing to sacrifice of ourselves to maintain that unity. Not only are we to give up ourselves to maintain unity, we are also shown that the same is necessary to glorify Christ. In whatever we do, that should be our main priority over ourselves. Finally, one of the major themes of the book is the list of examples Paul gives. In showing what true selflessness looks like, he gave four examples of people whom they could emulate.

KEY VERSES

There are plenty of familiar verses in this short epistle, particularly 4:13. In keeping with the themes, however, 2:1-4 and 4:2 are particularly noteworthy. 2:1-4 gives the basic command of the book—basically, love each other and humble yourselves before each other and before God to main-

tain unity in mind and purpose. 4:2 gives us a glimpse at one of the problems the church at Philippi was experiencing: “I urge Euodia and Syntyche to live in harmony in the Lord.” These two women were clearly having some kind of quarrel, which helps us understand why Paul decided to spend so much of his letter in exhorting the church to put each other first and not be self-centered.

KEY PEOPLE

Obviously Euodia and Syntyche were important characters in this writing because they helped provide the occasion. Their conflict is driving a wedge in the church’s unity, which is taking away some of the joy that comes from serving God together. Paul urged them to be of the “same mind” and then proceeded to provide four examples of men who showed what living with that same mind looked like. His first example, naturally, was Jesus Christ (2:5ff). We see all of the things Christ gave up for us and the difficult trials He went through because He had that mindset. Timothy was the next example because he showed he was unlike the others in that he cared for the interests of Christ instead of himself (2:21). Epaphroditus was also pointed to as a role model, since he had risked his life for the work of Christ (2:30). Finally, Paul reminded them of the things he gave up for the Gospel, but also that those things didn’t really matter because nothing of this world matters when it comes to Christ.

KEY WORDS

The key words (as usual) closely follow the themes. As stated, “joy” and “rejoice” were used frequently. While not occurring as often as those two, the words occurring from 1:27-2:4, such as “one,” “mind,” and “same” are very important, as you can tell from the unity theme.

The Christian life is one of joy in all situations, but when we put ourselves first we can fully expect that we will not have that joy, and we can easily rob those around us of it. This month, let’s make a concentrated effort to put others first as much as possible, and also to strive for the unity that is found in Christ and His Word. As always, if you have any thoughts on this study, feel free to email me at jack@focuspress.org. ▲



There are certain phrases that really “catch my eye” from time to time. The phrase *catch my eye* simply means that someone or in this case something, i.e. “certain phrases” drew my attention. Consider one with me.

In 1945, President Harry Truman was given a gift from a close friend. While passing through a federal reformatory in Oklahoma, this friend noticed a sign on the warden’s desk and had a copy made. On one side, the sign simply read, “The Buck Stops Here.” Being displayed on President Truman’s desk for years, this sign would serve as a statement of responsibility and a reminder that at some point, the buck can no longer be passed.

IT ISN'T SOMEONE ELSE'S FAULT WHEN WE CHOOSE TO SIN.

While Harry Truman might have popularized the phrase “the buck stops here,” he was not the one to invent the concept. The word *buck* used in both “pass the buck” and “the buck stops here” is actually a term drawn from the game of poker. As the dealer, the man would have a marker in front of him that was referred to as a “buck.” History records this marker often was a buckhorn knife; however, it is also believed many times it was a silver dollar—thus a dollar would have been referred to as a “buck” from time to time. If the one with the “buck” didn’t want to deal, he would simply “pass the buck” to the person on his left. Eventually, the buck stopped with someone and they took responsibility for dealing. Funny how learning a little background helps us better understand our phrases.

“Passing the buck” or not taking responsibility is demonstrated all too well in some of the individuals in the Bible. Beginning with the very first sin recorded in the book of Genesis, we see both man and woman trying to pass the buck. Another such case of trying to pass on taking responsibility comes with Moses when he approached the Lord in the burning bush on Mt. Horeb, the mountain of God. When told he was being sent to rescue the children of Israel from Egyptian bondage, Moses reservedly replied, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children

of Israel out of Egypt?” (Exodus 3:11). Over and over again, God would provide for Moses answers, signs, and wonders. Each time, Moses would reply with another reason why he shouldn’t be the one who was sent or why he couldn’t go. Finally, the Bible records for us that Moses cried out to God saying, “O my Lord, please send by the hand of whomever else You may send” (Exodus 4:13). This attempt to “pass the buck” brought with it God’s anger, specifically kindled against Moses. What a terrible place to be in!

As a contrast to both of the above examples, when the major prophet Isaiah was allowed to see a vision of the throne room recorded in Isaiah 6, we read of the Lord asking the question, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?” (vs. 8). Someone needed to go tell the people of Israel of the pending hardships due to sin, but who? Apparently, Isaiah didn’t look around for someone else to step up. He boldly volunteered with the ever-so-famous phrase, “Here am I! Send me” (vs. 8). Also, after being confronted by the prophet Nathan, king David didn’t make excuses for his sin. He rather cried out saying, “Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your loving kindness; according to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions” (Psalm 51:1).

What is the biggest difference between these two sets of examples? It’s the same quality that drives a man like President Harry Truman to place a sign on his desk, making such a strong statement. That quality is being willing to take responsibility for your actions, your sins, your position, and your charge. When Truman delivered his farewell address to the American people in 1953, he referred to this quality within the position of President when he said, “The President—whoever he is—has to decide. He can’t pass the buck to anybody. No one else can do the deciding for him. That’s his job” (<http://www.trumanlibrary.org/buckstop.htm>). As Christians, you and I must decide right now where the buck stops. It can’t be passed around forever when it comes to subjects like reaching the lost with the Gospel of Jesus Christ or when it comes to functioning within the body of Christ. It isn’t some one else’s fault when we choose to sin or we loosen the reins of our tongues. The buck stops with each and every one of us individually. It’s time to take responsibility. ▲

THE

Over the last few months, the media has told us about many disgruntled Americans who have taken to the streets with protests all over our country. These individuals have become known as the Occupy Wall Street protesters. While not having a completely unified message, most of their complaints center around struggles to find prosperity in their lives at the level of others, difficulty in paying back loans for education and other things for which they have borrowed, and a general disgust with the financial inequality they see in our society. One of their rallying cries has been that they are a part of the 99%. This is a reference to the fact that a large portion of the wealth in our country is in the hands of 1% of the population. While this may have a certain appeal to our American sense of entitlement, it is done with a complete lack of the larger picture of the wealth the majority of us enjoy as Americans.

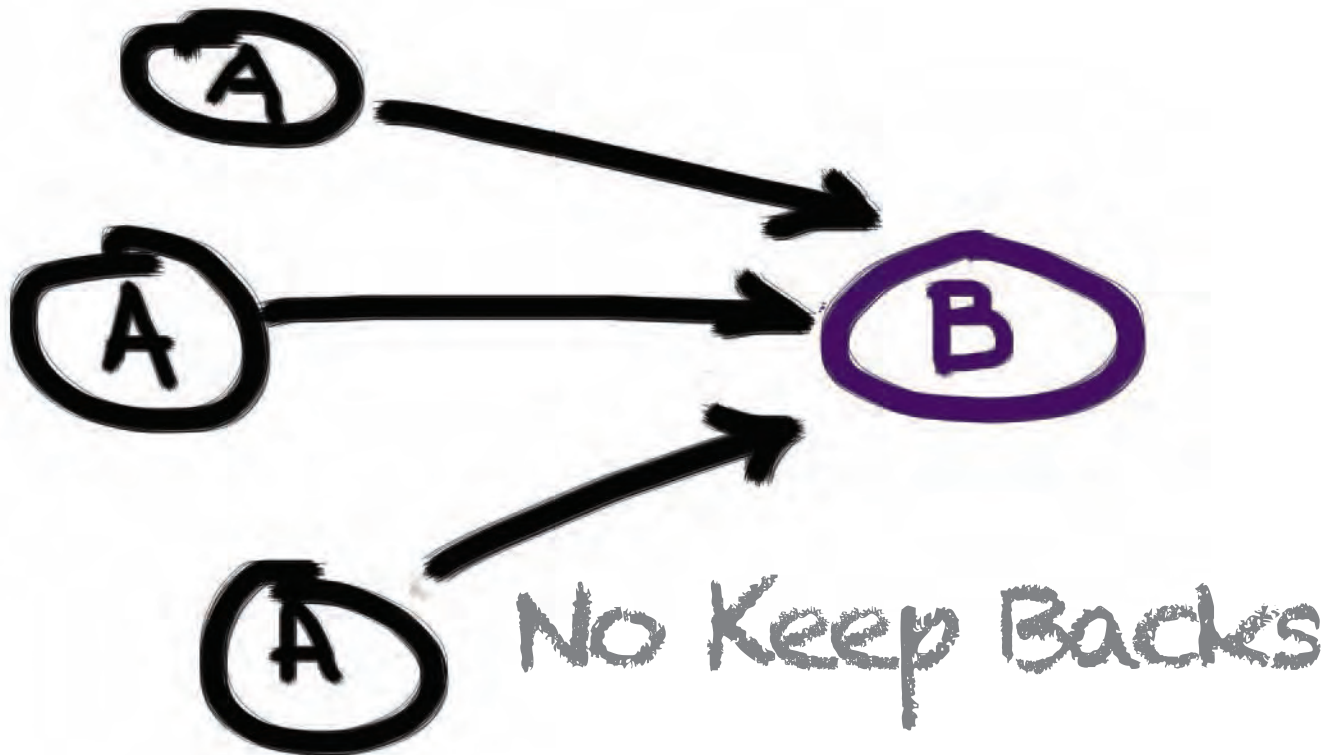
The global reality is that very few American are really a part of the 99%. When we compare our wealth and prosperity to the rest of the world, we are much closer to the 1%. According to www.globalrichlist.com, if an individual has an income of \$47,000, he is actually in the top 1% of wage earners in the world. If you don't make quite that much, you might be interested to know that those making \$33,700 per year are in the top 5% of annual worldwide wage earners. Even those who make what most would consider poverty—\$25,400—are in the top 10% of global wage earners. I share these numbers because it is so easy for us to lose sight of how truly blessed we are and only see what we don't have. I was reminded recently just how easy it is to lose the proper appreciation for all the blessings God has given us. I just moved into a new house that is roughly three times as large as the house I grew up in. We have been incredibly blessed by God; however, in order to get to our new home you have to drive past some houses that are even larger. On occasion I find myself wondering why I don't have one of those houses. The reality is the there will always be someone with more than me, but God has blessed me with more than most.

I recently heard about a village in India that Bill and Melinda Gates have adopted. We would all recognize that Mr. Gates is an incredibly rich philanthropist. As he began to investigate the responsible things he could do with his money, he visited and talked with many people around the world. On one such trip to this village he visited with a woman in her small hut. After he left her home a reporter approached her and asked, "Do you realize that one of the richest men in the world was just in your home?" Her response was, "Everyone from the West is rich." In her mind, anyone who had the financial resources to fly halfway around the world is an incredibly wealthy individual. As I write this article sitting in an airplane, I am reminded that to this woman there is **little difference** between Bill Gates and me. We **both** have more than she could ever imagine.

I wonder if our complaints of inequality and demands for more appear to the world much as the complaints of millionaires appear to us. I also wonder how our failure to acknowledge and praise the Creator for our prosperity must appear to the One who has given us all of the things we have. James 1:17 still says, "Every good and perfect gift is from above." May God be praised for all the things that I do have to enjoy. There is a great need for us to be reminded from time to time that we are closer to the top 1% than the bottom 99%. And it is time for Christians to give back to God like we are in that 1%! ▲

If leadership is moving people from where they are—point A—to a better place—point B, then leaders must consider what they can provide the people in order to help them move. If a leader doesn't have resources to offer, he is merely a leader in position only, which is the lowest level of leadership. Last month we mentioned that James Whittaker, a Mt. Everest climbing guide said, "Taking people to the top that could never get there without my assistance is my greatest accomplishment." He understands leadership. If people could get to point B on their own, they wouldn't need leaders. We didn't design it that way; God did. Paul expressed this type of leadership to the elders at Ephesus when he said, "You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, ... how I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house (Acts 20:18, 20). Whether it was instruction, persuasion, work, prayers, opportunities, encouragement, or communication, Paul offered others what they needed in order to grow. Paul was a resourceful leader who could say ...

"I kept back nothing that was helpful."



PAUL'S RESOURCEFULNESS

The Resource of Persuasion: Great leaders must be able to persuade people. Many followers do not believe they can grow and others are simply set in their way. They often need persuasion to take the first or next step. Paul persuaded listeners of the "things concerning the Kingdom of God" (Acts 19:8). His persuasion was effective as many stepped out of the world and into the Lord's Kingdom! Maybe you remember who persuaded you to become a Christian. Probably every teacher remembers the person who persuaded him or her to teach the first class. A song leader will remember who persuaded him to lead his first song. Every preacher can remember who persuaded him to proclaim his first message. Leaders persuade.

But there is a prerequisite to persuasion. If a leader doesn't know where he is leading a person, the discussion about whether or not he is persuasive is in vain. Proper vision must preclude powerful persuasion. But what good is vision if there is no communication? Too many congregations say, "Our leaders never communicate. We don't know anything until it has already happened." This dictatorship style needs to be exchanged for a shepherding model where leaders walk among the people. In this style of leadership the communication is natural and comes across as an ongoing dialog through life. The dictatorship style may work to manage buildings and bank accounts, but it has never been effective in growing people or Christians (1 Peter 5:3). Therefore, clear communication is a necessary partner of persuasion.

The Resource of Communication: Paul was a great communicator. Paul wrote about communication in Ephesians 3:3-4 by saying, "How that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ)." Paul knew that his written message would pro-

vide understanding of things they didn't previously know. We, too, should provide communication to lead followers into greater understanding. There is no such thing as a strong leader who is ineffective in communication. "It just isn't my nature to communicate," a leader quips. Now is the time to repent, allowing all things to become new in Christ Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:17). Learn from God's example of communication. God, as the ultimate leader, has always communicated with mankind. Of all the modes God could have chosen to communicate with us, today He uses the written message. How are you doing at communication? Husbands and fathers must have strong communication if they are going to be able to help their family move through the obstacles and responsibilities of life. Elders must communicate with staff, deacons, and the congregation openly and frequently. Followers are not only left in the dark without proper communication from their leaders but often do not trust silent leaders. If a follower's best interest was in the heart of the leader, he will know it through the leader's communication. In other words, it isn't the follower's place to try to guess the moves of leadership; instead it is the leaders' place to clearly reveal the path to point B. A leader quickly becomes aware of the fact that great communication requires extra work. This leads us to the next resource Paul freely gave, the resource of work. Let's consider a leader's work ethic next month.

Application: List three people whom you will persuade to grow. What is their point B? How will you communicate it and persuade them? Can you convince them that point B is worth the risk and effort? What will you do to keep communication open as an ongoing dialogue? Stating it one time won't work; you must walk with them to point B. Persuade them to start the journey and talk all along the way! Say with Paul, "I have kept back nothing that was helpful." Let's move people! ▲

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