

The Discerner

“Hereby know we the spirit of truth and the spirit of error”
1 John 4:6

The Voice of the Religion Analysis Service

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A NON-DENOMINATIONAL QUARTERLY EXPOSING UNBIBLICAL TEACHING & MOVEMENTS

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FROM THE EDITOR

On a recent trip, I stayed in a motel in North Seattle. It is my custom to begin the day with a Bible reading and prayer so I looked for a convenient Gideon Bible in one of the dresser drawers. Sure enough, a Gideon Bible was there, but interestingly, also a copy of "Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures" by Mary Baker Eddy. Eddy's book is the basic textbook of Christian Science.

Christian Science does not publish the exact number of adherents in its congregations, but, as documented by the Google website, we can assume that this sect does continue to carry on a very structured activity in churches of this country. Christian Science is especially oriented to intellectual circles and to women. Its newspaper, "The Christian Science Monitor," enjoys a certain national eminence and prominence in the reporting and analysis of current events.

Having had little firsthand contact with Christian Scientists over the years, I flipped through the pages of this

edition published in 1910 and re-published in 1986 by the Mary Baker Foundation. Just a few lines in the section on “Science, Theology, and Medicine”, pp. 107-164, should convince us that Christian Science is neither “Christian” nor “Science”: “Christian Science explains all cause and effect as mental, not physical” (p. 114) and “Christian Science attaches no physical nature and significance to the Supreme Being or His manifestation” (p.117).

Christian Science denies the reality of matter, the doctrine of the Incarnation of Christ, the reality of evil, suffering, and judgment. Its teachings are rooted in Eastern religions and ancient Gnosticism. Its labyrinth of convoluted philosophy, metaphysics, and questionable healing arts, mixed with its denial of the normative interpretation of Scripture makes Christian Science a cult to be avoided and refuted.

Laurence J. Sutherland

WITH THIS ISSUE

As editor of *The Discerner* I am thankful for those who willingly take the time and expend the energy to research issues in current evangelical Christianity. Over the years, Dr. Roy Knuteson has aptly and succinctly defined topics of significance for our readers. In this edition he focuses on the “Binding of Satan”, what this biblical term means over against considerable confusion in some circles.

Dr. Ron McRoberts proceeds with his primer on classic dispensationalism with Part IV - “Examining the Dispensations”. McRoberts wrestles with the unfolding historical and covenantal relationship of God with His people as viewed from the dispensational viewpoint. This is theology and history linked together, or, as Paul would formulate it: “rightly dividing the word of truth (IITim.2:15). By the way, if you have not read the first three parts as yet and wish to get copies of them, please call our office. There is a minimal charge of \$2.00 per copy which includes postage.

Several readers commented that Paul Ness really “hit the nail on the Head” with his incisive analysis (“My Perverted Generation-The Legacy of 1967, Part I). In Part II Ness continues to address the resulting aberrations in American life. It is a clarion call to repentance. Another social analysis is given by Woody Bridell, who dares to take on the narcissistic challenge of “self-esteem”. His Part I of “The Fog of Self-Esteem” traces and defines the 100-year-old background of this unbiblical theme in psychology and education.

Again, we are indebted to Rev. Erv Ingebretson’s in-depth book reviews-this time on “Scripture Alone” by James R. White.

I wish you stimulating reading moments from these contributions.

Laurence J. Sutherland

THE BINDING OF SATAN

By Roy E. Knuteson

The Bible clearly states that Satan, our adversary, will be bound by the Lord. (Revelation 20:3). The question is not *if*, but *when* this can occur. There are three basic interpretations regarding the timing of this important event.

The Charismatic View

Charismatics usually do not deny a future fulfillment of the Revelation 20 passage regarding Satan's bondage, but in recent years it has become common practice in many Charismatic and Pentecostal churches to "bind Satan" at the beginning of a church service. By means of emphatic prayer and dramatic command, Satan is believed to be driven from the assembly in order for the Lord to have complete control of that particular service. The alleged scriptural support for this practice is found in Matthew 12:29 where Jesus said:

"How can anyone enter the strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house".

The context of this question raised by our Lord has to do with the casting out of demons. Jesus was indeed entering into "the strong man's house" (Satan's domain) and thereby limiting the Devil and his demons' activity through His ministry of exorcism. By such action, Jesus was demonstrating to the Pharisees that He was stronger than the "strong man", meaning the Devil.

This solitary question by the Lord in no way supports the modern notion that it is anyone's responsibility to expel the Devil from church services. Nor is there any Scriptural example to even suggest that the disciples understood Jesus' question to be the basis for the current Charismatic practice of "binding Satan". This is another example of taking a single verse out of context and establishing a doctrine to support a given practice. The illustration of Jesus applies only to Him and is never cited again with reference to the exorcisms performed by the Apostles. Casting demons out of unsaved people is one thing, but casting Satan out of church services is quite another, and it is not supported by the New Testament. Only

by deductive reasoning can anyone arrive at the conclusion that the Devil can be bound by believers today through personal command or prayer.

The Amillennial View

The Amillennial school of interpretation includes the Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, Presbyterian, Methodist, the United Church of Christ and other denominations. There may be individuals within these churches who are not Amillennial. However, the denominations themselves have embraced the teachings of Augustine of the Fourth Century which denies a literal thousand year reign of Christ upon the earth; hence the name “Amillennial” meaning “No Millennium”. This title comes from the Latin *mille* meaning thousand and *annus* meaning year-a *Thousand years*.

By adopting an allegorical or spiritualizing method of interpretation, they have concluded that there is no Rapture of the Church, no Great Tribulation, and no Millennium. Some Amillennialists equate the prophesied Millennium with heaven. The vast majority, however, equate it with the Church and believe the organized church is the fulfillment of the Kingdom promises and, therefore, we are in the Kingdom now.

The One Thousand Years of Revelation 20 is considered to be an indefinite period of time culminating with the Second Coming of Jesus, who will then determine the destiny of all mankind and usher in the Eternal State. This line of deductive reasoning forces the Amillennialists to conclude that Satan is bound now since Revelation 20 clearly states that Satan will be bound during the Millennium (verses 2,3).

However, the Bible, the history of the Christian church, and human experience all testify to the fact that Satan is actively engaged during this present age against believers and unbelievers alike. Consider the following Scriptural evidence regarding Satan’s present activities in the world of yesterday and today:

I John 5:19 states that “the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one”.

II Corinthians 4:4 describes Satan as the “god of this age”, who blinds the minds of unbelievers so they cannot see the Light and be saved.

He is presently “deceiving the Nations”, (Rev. 20:3) and he “deceives the whole world”(Rev. 12:9).

In the parables of the Kingdom of Heaven in Matthew 13, Jesus revealed that Satan is presently very active snatching away the seed that has been sown in the hearts of the hearers (13:19), and by sowing weed seeds among the good seed (13:39).

Satan is called the “accuser of the brethren” and has access to the Third Heaven now. (Rev. 12:10 cf. Job 1:6-12).

Ananias is declared to have his heart filled by Satan (Acts 5:3), while the wicked man in I Cor. 5:5 was to be delivered over to the Devil.

Christians are constantly urged to “resist the Devil” (James 4:7), to “stand against the wiles of the Devil” (Eph. 6:11) and to “escape the snares of the Devil”. (II Tim. 2:26).

Paul testifies that he was severely tried by “a messenger of Satan” (II Cor. 12:7).

Paul reveals that Satan “walks about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour” (I Peter 5:8).

The testimony of Scripture is that while Satan is very active, believers are promised victory over the adversary:

“He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world” (I John 4:4).

“The one born of God keeps himself and the wicked one does not touch him” (I John 5:8).

“Resist the Devil and he will flee from you” (James 4:7).

“And they overcame him (Satan) by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony” (Rev 12:11).

“Above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one” (Eph. 6:16).

There is no evidence whatever that Satan is bound or limited in any way now as he will be in the future. Augustine’s theology regarding the Kingdom and those who embrace his teachings are guilty of outright error as far as the binding of Satan is concerned.

The Biblical View

Revelation 20:2-3 describes a future event when Satan will be seized by a mighty angel at the end of the Great Tribulation. He will be bound and confined to the “Bottomless

Pit", or the Abyss, for one thousand years to prevent him from deceiving the nations until the Millennium has run its course. A straightforward reading of the Bible demands a literal or normal interpretation which describes in detail, a future day when Satan will literally be bound and cast into his prison house for one thousand years.

Amillennialists can be charged with obscuring the plain meaning of these simple prophetic words and are, therefore, guilty of leading their followers into gross error. Indeed, they do this with most all the prophetic Scriptures and thereby neglect, obscure and distort one-fourth of the Bible. Little wonder that members of these churches rarely, if ever, hear a message on Bible Prophecy and the correct view of the Kingdom and the binding of Satan.

Anyone, whether child or adult, who reads Revelation 20 without being prejudiced by Amillennial hermeneutics, will naturally conclude that the binding of Satan will occur exactly as described, and for the exact period of time allotted for him. To spiritualize this portion of the Word in order to make it descriptive of the present age is to destroy its plain wording and to lead multitudes of believers and unbelievers astray.

All Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version of the Holy Bible.

A PRIMER ON CLASSIC DISPENSATIONALISM

PART IV: EXAMINING THE DISPENSATIONS

By Ronald E. McRoberts, PhD

Introduction

This article continues The Discerner series on classic dispensationalism. Part I¹ of the series focused on the hermeneutical principles underlying dispensationalism with emphasis on literal or normal interpretation; Part II² focused on the definition and characteristics of a dispensation with emphasis on the stewardship relationship; and Part III³ identified the seven commonly accepted dispensations and labeled them in accordance with their primary features.

In Part IV, the emphases are twofold. First, additional preparation is provided for a more thorough examination of each of the seven dispensations. The examination includes discussion of the test, failure, and judgment associated with each dispensation as outlined in Part II. In addition, in response to ultradispensationalists who are tempted to discard all truth revealed before the present dispensation, the examination also addresses the progressive nature of the dispensations as illustrated with respect to four biblical concepts: (1) the faith that is counted as righteousness, (2) God's provision to encourage and enable righteousness, (3) sacrifice, and (4) covenants. Use of the adjective *progressive* in this context describes the refining and maturing of God's dispensational or stewardship relationships with man and should not be construed as endorsement of a recent movement characterized as progressive dispensationalism. The latter movement is an aberrant form of dispensationalism and, along with ultradispensationalism, will be discussed in a later part of this series. The second emphasis of Part IV is an examination of the first three dispensations with respect to test, failure, and judgment and with respect to the progressive nature of faith, God's provision to encourage and enable righteousness, sacrifice, and covenant relationships.

Preparation

The author of Hebrews defines faith as "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."⁴ *Assurance* in this passage conveys the idea of the reality or the exact representation of these *things*. Ryrie⁵ notes that *conviction*, in this context, means that

these *things* are treated as if “they were already objects of sight rather than of hope.” For example, Paul (Gal. 3:24), quoting Genesis 15:6, states that Abraham’s faith with respect to these *things* was counted to him as righteousness. The Hebrews and Galatians passages emphasize that believers of all dispensations obtain righteousness on the basis of their faith; i.e., their assurance and their conviction of these *things*. Although it was always faith in God that was counted as righteousness, it is appropriate to ask what these *things* were in which they had assurance and conviction. Paul writes in Romans 10:9 that “if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.”⁶ Because the event had not occurred and had not been prophesied by the time of Abraham, certainly there can be no expectation that the *things* associated with Abraham’s faith included God’s raising Jesus from the dead. Thus, it is also appropriate to ask if the *things* associated with the faith that was counted as righteousness changed as the dispensations changed? The examination of the individual dispensations identifies the *things* associated with faith and discusses their progressive refinement.

Although righteousness is obtained by faith, not by obedience, believers of all dispensations are, nevertheless, expected to obey God (e.g., Deut. 28, 1 Pet 1:14), and this obedience is as directed by God, not as conjured by man. In His mercy, God provides means to encourage and enable obedience. In Galatians 3:24, Paul indicates that the Law was provided as a tutor; i.e., an external means to encourage and enable obedience. However, Jeremiah (31:33) declares that in future times God will internalize this means by writing His law on the hearts of His people, Israel. In the examination of the dispensations, the progressive means by which God encourages and enables obedience is traced.

The concept of sacrifice permeates Scriptures, primarily because man has been unable and unwilling to practice obedience. Although the system of sacrifices under the Mosaic Law is familiar to most believers, the concept of sacrifice predates Moses by many centuries; for example, Abel, Noah, and Abraham all offered sacrifices. The progressive development of the concept and practice of sacrifice is traced through the dispensations.

Finally, the close linkage between the dispensations and the covenants God establishes with man cannot be ignored. Transitions between dispensations are characterized by failure in the previous dispensation, judgment, and revelation to initiate the new dispensation. The new revelations are often in the form of covenants. The

examination of covenants focuses on four aspects: (1) the features of the covenants, (2) the party with whom God establishes the covenants, (3) the parties who are affected by the covenants, and (4) the conditional or unconditional nature of the covenants. The conditional versus unconditional nature of covenant promises is crucial for dispensationalists who understand that unconditional covenant promises cannot be revoked, transferred, or revised to the detriment of the party with whom they were made. Thus, dispensationalists regard God's covenant promises to Abraham and his physical descendants as unconditional and not subject to transfer to other parties such as the Church and, as a result, maintain a strict distinction between Israel and the Church. The examination of the covenants through the dispensations focuses on the progressive development and refinement of covenant promises.

The Dispensations

Dispensation of Innocence (Genesis 1:3-3:6). God's stewardship arrangement for Adam and Eve during their residence in the Garden is characterized by their state of innocence; i.e., their ignorance of good and evil. Their steward responsibility was to tend the Garden; to be fruitful and multiply; and to fill and subdue the earth. Their test of obedience was to refrain from eating of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God expected obedience in this regard, and provided an additional incentive, albeit a negative one, to encourage Adam and Eve's obedience. The incentive was the threat that if they ate from this tree, they would die. Their failure was that they did eat of that tree. The judgment God imposed on Adam and Eve and their descendants had multiple components: (1) they and their descendants would die a physical death; (2) the ground man must now toil for sustenance was cursed and would bring forth thorns and thistles; (3) pain would accompany childbirth; and (4) man would rule over woman. The judgment was unconditional; there would be no relief for Adam, Eve, or their descendants from the effects of these judgments. God's response to Adam and Eve's knowledge that they were naked was to provide them coverings of animal skins. This is the first instance of a sacrifice being made to cover the effects of sin and initiates the practice of the blood sacrifice.

Dispensation of Conscience (Genesis 3:7-8:14). Coincident with their banishment from the Garden, God established a covenant with Adam, Eve, and their descendants that defined the new stewardship relationship; i.e., the new dispensation. The features of the covenant are unconditional and include the continuing stewardship

responsibilities from the previous dispensation to fill the earth, albeit now with the pain of childbirth, and to cultivate the ground, albeit a ground that was now cursed with thorns and thistles. In addition, Adam, Eve, and their descendants were to do well and to master sin (Gen. 4:7). To enable man in this endeavor, God provided conscience.

The *thing* associated with the faith that counted as righteousness was God's promise that one who would "bruise the serpent's head" (Gen 3:15) would come from Adam's descendants. Regarding this promise as a reality, an accomplishment rather than just an anticipated hope, was counted as righteousness.

The practice of sacrifice that was initiated with God's sacrifice of animals to provide a covering for Adam and Eve continued. Genesis 4:3-4 records that Cain and Abel brought offerings to God. Cain's offering consisted of the fruit of the ground, while Abel's offering consisted of the firstlings of the flock. Although Scriptures are not explicit as to why God regarded Abel's offering but not Cain's, the fact cannot be ignored that Abel's offering consisted of a blood sacrifice while Cain's did not.

The test of obedience was to do well and practice righteousness, encouraged and enabled by conscience. The failure was wickedness as exemplified by Cain's murder of Abel (Gen. 4:8), Lamech's violence and multiple murders (Gen. 4:23-24), and the pervasiveness of evil thoughts and deeds (Gen. 6:5). The judgment was the Flood that God sent to destroy man, except Noah and his family.

Dispensation of Human Government (Gen. 8:15-11:9). God initiated the new dispensation with a covenant that included important features: (1) the ground would not be cursed again, (2) while the earth remains, so shall the seasons and day and night, (3) the flesh of animals was given for food, except the blood, (4) God would not again destroy every living thing by flood, and (5) human, civil government with the right of and responsibility for capital punishment was established. The focus of this covenant, as exemplified by the last two components, is the sanctity of life. Not only will God never destroy all life again, but life is to be so highly regarded that one who takes another's life must forfeit his own. God then established the rainbow as the sign of the covenant. Although this sign is often associated with only one feature of the covenant, God's promise not to destroy all life with a flood again, the rainbow is, in fact, a sign confirming all the covenant provisions (Gen. 9: 12). Thus, so long as the rainbow remains, all the provisions of this covenant remain in force. Further, this unconditional covenant applied not only to Noah and his immediately family but to all his descendants which, by exten-

sion, includes all the peoples of the earth to this day.

Other than the features of the new covenant God made with Noah, many aspects of the new dispensation were similar to those of the previous dispensation. The *things* in the new dispensation associated with the faith that counted as righteousness include God's promise, continued from the previous dispensation, that He would make provision for man's salvation. In the physical realm, Noah is acknowledged for having exercised such faith at the end of the previous dispensation by building the ark and trusting that God would save his family (Heb. 11:7). Regarding sacrifices, Noah's first act upon leaving the ark was to make a burnt offering of the clean animals and birds; God's positive regard for the offering confirms that the practice of the blood sacrifice continued into the new dispensation. Man's stewardship responsibilities included the commandment, first given in the Garden, to be fruitful and multiply, and to fill and subdue the earth. As in the previous dispensation, man was expected to do well and master sin, and the encouraging and enabling role of conscience in this regard continued. However, as an additional inducement to cherish life, God established the negative incentive by which the life of a murderer would be forfeited at the hands of human government.

The dispensational test related back to the stewardship responsibility to fill and subdue the earth. Instead of complying, however, men defied God by erecting the Tower of Babel as a sign of their fame and as a perceived impediment to their being scattered across the earth against their will (Gen. 11:4). God's judgment was to confuse their language and scatter them abroad in accordance with His will.

Next: An examination of the remaining dispensations: Promise, Law, Grace, and Millennial Kingdom.

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MY PERVERTED GENERATION— THE LEGACY OF 1967

PART II THE FALLOUT

by Paul Donovan Ness

Music is seldom neutral. Whether boldly or subtly, it usually carries some message. As an art form, music reflects what the music writer thinks and feels—how he or she perceives the world. But music can also become an effective advertisement for a belief or philosophy, promoting the worldview that gave rise to the thoughts and feelings conveyed. This was certainly the case with the popular music that transformed my generation’s worldview in the late 1960’s (as discussed in Part 1).

The initial exuberance of the counterculture explosion came to an end by the early seventies. It was said that the music had died, and we left the yellow brick road behind. But to salvage the movement, many decided to interpret the whole episode as having been a spell that came from God. Their new mission would be to infuse this “blessing” into the mainstream, day by day in every possible way. And so instead of continuing to drop out of society, the devotees of this strange new religion began getting involved in the institutions of education, government, business, and the Church. The resulting synthesis has led to the widespread erosion of biblical values in America.

During the quarter century from 1967 to 1992, the fallout from this anti-biblical movement found its way into every area of life. By the 1992 presidential election, the new morality had risen to the highest realms of power in our society. Many people really could no longer see any linkage between obeying the God revealed in Scripture and being blessed as a nation. And later, as the new century dawned, most citizens seemed far more concerned about money and pleasure than about biblical morality. Even today, after 9/11 and the ensuing wars and rumors of wars, a large segment of our population is still determined to make the world safe for sin. They continue to espouse morally liberal policies as solutions to the problems we face.

HAVING A FORM OF GODLINESS

What really was being foisted upon us through the music in 1967 can best be understood as a false gospel that promised a false kingdom. It was the gospel of “Do what you please.” It promised the kingdom of “the brotherhood of man.” And the christ of this kingdom was Self. Without realizing it, we were dealing with a very antichristian, anti-biblical message. Some may have thought it was harmless. Some may have thought it was from God, but it was actually from the god of this world—Satan. One would have to be willfully ignorant not to conclude that our generation’s strange form of godliness fulfills what the apostle Paul wrote nearly two thousand years ago. In fact it would be difficult to come up with a more accurate description of our time than this:

This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.

For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy,

Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good,

Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God;

Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. (2 Timothy 3:1-5)

Despite claims to the contrary, the counterculture movement that has swept America since 1967 has been nothing short of religious. If we define a fundamentalist as one who adheres to the basic beliefs of his or her religion, we would have to say that our nation has been engulfed in a frenzied wave of humanistic fundamentalism. Islamic fundamentalism takes its adherents back to the Koran. Christian fundamentalism would take one back to the Word of God, the Bible. Humanistic fundamentalism, for its part, tends to make a god out of humanity itself in all its diversity, all its potential, and all its desires.

Humanism is a mysterious religion based on the irrational beliefs that man is basically good, that the moral standards (or lack of them) of all individuals and groups are equally valid, and that human action (often through government) can solve all of our problems. This is why we have been preached to for some time now about what is “politically correct.” Make no mistake; those who make such claims have their minds made up about what is

“religiously correct” as well. These people are indeed fundamentalists, but their fundamentals did not come from the Bible.

The American ideals of freedom and prosperity are no longer seen in the light of the Bible. Freedom was once valued as the opportunity to serve God with one’s life, in good conscience and without persecution. Prosperity was understood as God’s blessing by grace upon one’s work. But now freedom has come to mean license to do whatever one pleases as long as it supposedly “does not hurt anyone else.” Prosperity, on the other hand, has come to be seen as everyone’s basic right to the benefits of a materialistic society, regardless of behavior. God, who has spoken to us in the Bible, has been removed from the equation.

And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient;

Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness, full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers,

Backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents;

Without understanding, covenant breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful:

Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them. (Romans 1:28-32)

AS IN THE DAYS OF NOAH

Our days run parallel with the days of Noah. Long before the Flood the descendants of Seth (of which Noah was one) had possessed a godly heritage. They looked for the promised Seed (Genesis 3:15) who would be born into the world for the purpose of destroying the Devil. They called upon the Lord (Genesis 4:25-26) and they endeavored to walk with Him in their daily lives, like Enoch (Genesis 5:24). But having known the ways of God, there came a generation in which they turned away from Him and embraced temporal pleasure instead (Genesis 6:1-2). They took wives of the people around them who didn’t care for the ways of God. They married them for their outward beauty, without regard to the incompatibility of their religious practices. Thus they married the ways as well as the women of unbelief. This produced a synthesis of worldviews, a slippery slope down which the ways

and knowledge of God were corrupted and eventually lost until only Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord (Genesis 6:8). Today, our godly heritage is in danger of being lost too.

The people of the pre-Flood era eventually passed a point of no return. When the wickedness in their culture had reached a certain stage, they could no longer find repentance. They became totally given over to selfishness and evil—so much so that they could not even think about anything else. The Bible says that the imagination of their hearts was only evil continually (Genesis 6:5-7). The continual evil imagination, often propagated now through the Internet and other modern means, is rapidly bringing our culture to the same point as those who lived in Noah's day.

AS IN THE DAYS OF LOT

After the Flood the basically sinful nature of man had not changed. But God instituted human government so that societies would incorporate His standards of moral conduct in their systems of laws and thus keep the sinful inclinations of individuals in check (Genesis (9:5-6). One lesson from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is that God holds cities, states, and countries responsible to uphold His unchanging moral values. Human government that is biblically based, though never perfect, will thus temper the moral extremes of anarchy on the one hand and repression on the other. Entire societies can become corrupt, however, and fail to fulfill their biblical mandate to legislate basic morality and restrain wickedness. This is what happened with the city-states of Sodom and Gomorrah.

The Bible tells us that Sodom's downfall was that they gave themselves over to fornication and strange flesh (Jude 7). We have already described how these same sins have overtaken America in the last few decades. Does anyone really think that our nation will escape the same judgment that befell Sodom and Gomorrah?

For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment;

And spared not the old world, but saved Noah, the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly;

And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them with an overthrow, making them an example unto those that after should live ungodly;

And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked

(For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds),

The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished; (2 Peter 2:4-9)

Today, as in the days of Noah and of Lot, the ways of God are being corrupted everywhere. One must ask whether America, like Sodom, has reached the place where we as a nation no longer appreciate how God has blessed and protected us. We need to be warned that when a nation refuses to uphold morality, it will inevitably end up promoting immorality. If it fails to judge in favor of biblical values, it will eventually judge against them. Such a nation will soon find itself in opposition to the One True God.

WILL A NATION INSULT THEIR CREATOR?

As in Sodom, so in America. God intended by design for men and women to behave in certain ways. The new morality which has come into being makes no such distinctions. Its adherents do not really care what the Bible says. Fornication, adultery, and homosexuality have become increasingly more acceptable in American society. However, they are still terrible insults to God's design for marriage, the family, and the individual heart.

Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind,

Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-10)

Likewise abortion, besides being the ultimate cover-up for fornication, is a direct insult to the Designer and Creator of human life. Abortion is a clear violation of the biblical commandment against murder (Exodus 21:13). After something like 50 million "legalized" abortions committed by this generation of Americans, is it any wonder that respect for human life is disappearing from our streets? Is it any wonder that rudeness and vulgarity have become so prevalent? America's children have been exposed to random violence since before they were born! Teenagers today live

with a reality not experienced by those of us born before 1973: Their own society could have killed them—legally! The perceived value of their lives, and of your life and mine in our culture, has been greatly diminished by this.

A WARNING TO TAKE SERIOUSLY

Both in the days of Lot and in the days of Noah, people thought that repentance was unnecessary. They thought life would go on as usual. But Jesus warned:

And as it was in the days of Noah, so shall it also be in the days of the Son of man.

They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day came that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all.

Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded;

But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all.

Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed. (Luke 17:26-30)

A large number of people today no longer take Christ's warnings seriously. They believe the world will continue on without divine intervention. Peter, by the Holy Spirit, anticipated their attitude when he wrote:

Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers walking after their own lusts,

And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.

For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water:

Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished:

But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. (2 Peter 3:3-7)

COMING TO CHRIST

In a world like this, how can one find Christ and gain the assurance of everlasting life? It is not by any works of righteousness that we might do. It is not even by any formula we must follow. Once we realize that God requires absolute holiness from every person, we must conclude that we are incapable of producing the kind of a life that pleases God. We recognize that without Christ we are utterly lost sinners, totally incapable of doing anything to save ourselves from being eternally condemned to the fires of hell.

We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). Many of us in this generation have fallen into the very sins mentioned in this article or are affected by them in some way. But there is a way of Salvation, cleansing, and healing! The only person who could ever meet the divine standard of righteousness was the Lord Jesus Christ, God in human flesh. Because of His great love, He endured the Cross and died to save all of us who would receive Him. He rose bodily from the grave and was seen by many (1 Corinthians 5-8). He ascended bodily into the heavens (Acts 1:9-11) and someday He will return to rule the world (Revelation 19:15).

Those who are saved have come to Jesus Christ. They have placed their trust in the Savior who died for their sins. Jesus Himself invites you,

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly of heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. (Matthew 11:28-30)

If you have never done so, repent and trust Jesus Christ today!

Paul Donovan Ness was a teenager in the 1960's. He turned to Christ at a time when popular music had become a vehicle for America's counterculture. He has worked as a machine designer in the printing industry since 1979. Over the years, Paul has been active in several Twin Cities area ministries. He has written concerning Bible prophecy as well as discernment issues. *My Perverted Generation* was originally presented in booklet form in 1993. Comments or suggestions regarding this article are welcome and may be addressed to: Paul Donovan Ness, P.O. Box 273, Circle Pines MN 55014-0273

“THE FOG OF SELF-ESTEEM”

By Woody Bridell

INTRODUCTION

Although self-esteem has only recently gained world acceptance, elements of this type of thinking have been around for over one hundred years. It began as many such theories do, just an idea looking for a proof text. The only proof text that seemed to support it was thoroughly embedded in human experience, but to many this was enough. Being the second cousin to secular humanism, and existentialism, it sought for a quasi scientific credibility to prop it up and make it palatable to the world at large. It found that credibility in two fields of study: sociology and psychology. Under such headings, it inched its way into the text books of America. Starting at the post secondary level, it descended into the high schools, and then moved seamlessly into elementary school systems across the country. It joined hands with the “sensitivity culture”, and became best friends of the “political correctness movement”. Although it claims to be the key that unlocks many truths about the human experience, it often embodies contradiction and paradox.

DEFINITION

Webster says that self-esteem is “satisfaction with oneself”. Although this definition is not often debated, the process in attaining inner satisfaction, is. Self-esteem always tries to deliver happiness or contentment from an internal source. Any therapy or healing must also come from this resource. All of this sounds good, but the only problem is that this human resource is very unreliable. Humans are often fraught with emotions that even the most highly touted psychologist finds difficult to uncover or rectify. Thus, asking a person to look inside and solve his own emotional problems is ridiculous. It is tantamount to the old adage, “physician, heal thyself”. This bootstrap mentality does not accept help from outside sources very well, and thus it restricts the individual’s potential. This is the exact opposite result that self-esteem proponents claim to deliver.

Two terms that have been often interchanged, but have

widely divergent meanings are: self-esteem and self-confidence. Self-esteem always concludes that the solution to any obstacle comes from one's self. Self-confidence begs the question: "In whom am I confident? - Is it in myself or an outside source, such as God?"

Self-esteem has been primarily evaluated from three perspectives of truth. These are scientific realism, postmodern textualism, and social constructionism. I will describe each briefly, and then move on, since I think they are all mental gymnastic exercises of how man has approached truth, but never really grasped it. Scientific realism says that "concepts are to be discovered rather than created". The secrets of truth, however, cannot be revealed, unless proper methodology is employed. This methodology is steeped in peer evaluation and in the replication or the "mirroring of reality". Postmodern textualism puts forth the idea that "all truth claims are of textual origin and therefore, symmetrical or equal". Although this view, in the mind of many, has done much to debunk the realist model of truth, it still fails to provide an adequate account of how some forms of writings or texts have become widespread and powerful, while others remain local and undistributed. Social constructionism concludes that psychological concepts are constructed and not discovered. This theory is very vague about how social construction is accomplished. It is based on ideas that are very circular and thus self-destructive to this concept. Although we have only uncovered the top soil of these theories, it is enough to reveal the frailties of their arguments. If the theory of self-esteem is weak, it is due in part, to the convoluted arguments it has espoused since its conception. Each of these concepts seems to expose the weakness of the argument it opposes, but fails to provide meaningful conclusions.

HISTORY

It is not well known, but the term "self-esteem" has a storied history. The following is by no means a complete history, but does highlight notable people who have influenced this self-help movement.

The first is American psychologist William James. In 1890 he produced studies of self-esteem based on introspection. He advanced the idea that self-esteem is an affective phenomenon which is lived as a feeling or emotion. He further describes it as a dynamic process affected by successes and failures.

James concluded that there is a connection between self-esteem with its values and success and competence.

In 1963, Robert White released his all new psychoanalytic/psychodynamic approach. He agreed with the basic thesis of William James in defining self-esteem as a developmental phenomenon, but also said that it develops gradually, being affected by and in turn affecting experience and behavior. White said self-esteem has two sources: an internal, based on one's own accomplishments, and an external source, which comes from affirmations from others. It is interesting that both of these sources are horizontal. White's theory was weak in that it could not be tested experimentally. The assumption of competence is central to this approach.

The third cog in the historic wheel of self-esteem was Morris Rosenberg. In 1965, he unveiled his socio-cultural approach. He defined self-esteem as "an attitude, (either positive or negative) that we have about ourselves". He proposed that self-esteem is a product of the influences of culture, society, family, and interpersonal relationships. He explained that the amount of self-esteem that an individual has "is in proportion to the degree which they positively measure up to a core set of values". He linked self-esteem to anxiety and depression. He based this on a study of a sample group of 5000 subjects. He also concluded that feelings of worthiness are a key to his approach to self-esteem.

In 1967, Stanley Coopersmith emerged with a behavioral perspective. He concurred with Rosenberg about attitude, worthiness, anxiety and depression, but also said success and self-worth were barometers of self-esteem. He promoted the constructionist theory (see above), stating that self-esteem is an acquired trait. In other words, an individual learns how worthy he is initially from his parental models of respect and worthiness. This is later reinforced by others. Coopersmith's findings were drawn from observational techniques in controlled situations as well as case studies and interviews. Coopersmith's theories were very inconclusive in that his research sampling was taken from middle-class white males in childhood and adolescence.

Then, in 1969, Nathaniel Brandon brought forward a humanistic view of self-esteem. He also defined self-esteem in terms of worthiness and competence, and boldly said that it is a basic human need. His conclusion was that self-esteem is

dynamic in nature, and is related to our ability to live in such a way as to honor our view of ourselves. Brandon concluded that there are six pillars of self-esteem: living consciously, self-acceptance, self-responsibility, self-assertiveness, living purposefully, and personal integrity. He also noted the serious negative consequences, such as substance abuse, suicide, anxiety, and depression that could occur if there is a lack of self-esteem. His findings have serious limitations, since they were based on a philosophy rather than on empirical data.

Seymour Epstein tried to explain self-esteem with his cognitive experiential view. He agreed with Brandon, by saying that self-esteem is a basic human need which motivates us consciously and unconsciously. In 1985 he wrote that “self-esteem is a consequence of an individual’s understanding of the world and others who are in relation to them. We must strive to maintain an equilibrium of self”. He goes on to say that there are different levels of self-esteem such as global or general overall self-esteem; intermediate, which is specific to certain domains such as competence, likeability or personal power; and situational, which are the everyday manifestations of self-esteem. His theory also has severe limitations in that it is more concerned with personality development than self-esteem.

In 1996, Steven Ward espoused his theory of self-esteem in the *Canadian Journal of Sociology*. He used the actor-network theory to debunk other views of self-esteem. He argues that truth-making can be seen as an ongoing process involving the mobilization of human and non-human actants and the construction of an encompassing network of truth. He uses this approach to show how self-esteem slowly came to dominate discussions on the self in the twentieth century.

WORLD VIEW

The secular world says that self-esteem is a conceptual key for unlocking the “inherent secrets” of human behavior and as a cure for social and individual problems. The world view goes so far as to connect self-esteem with governmental budget deficits, by arguing that “people with self-esteem produce income and pay taxes...those without, tend to be users of taxes”. In addition, from a negative stand point, Steven Ward says that low levels of self-esteem are not only a central cause of various psychological problems, but are also an important contribution factor to a multitude of social problems.

Politicians have also put in their two cents worth. John Vasconcellos, the California law-maker, responsible for the formation of the task force to promote self-esteem, compared the new emphasis on self-esteem, with unlocking the secrets of the atom and the mysteries of outer space. It is quite obvious that the world thinks it has discovered something of mammoth proportion. Dorothy C. Briggs said that “if your child has high self-esteem, he has it made”. Other manuals declared that “self-esteem is the greatest gift you can give your child, and yourself... it is the cornerstone of mental health, learning and happiness”. (Hart 1987). They have gone so far as to say that “girls with low self-esteem were in danger of developing depression, eating disorders, being victims of crime, becoming involved in destructive relationships, practicing unsafe sex, and being unable to compete in the high-tech job market”. (Coleman 1993).

In addition to the medical journals that openly support this self-centered, self-healing, self-help movement; it is a matter of common discourse on TV and the internet. How did this “theory” get to such a place of world acceptance? Steven Ward states: “I am concerned with the process of truth making or objectification...how advocates of a fragile concept are able to recruit and mobilize enough allies to forge a network of truth so strong and encompassing that the concept becomes a self-evident matter of fact and fades into the background of acceptable knowledge”. This is exactly what took place with the self-esteem movement. It seems that the only criterium for the establishment of truth is for it to be accepted by the masses. This is a very dangerous barometer, since the masses have often been wrong. Truth, in fact, is something that stands alone, no matter how many people accept or deny it. It does not need to be propped up by man’s acceptance. It is self-supporting and enduring. All truth is God’s truth. Truth is not man-made and does not need global acceptance to make it authentic.

Gloria Steinem says that “self-esteem is ‘a birthright’, a first experience of seeing through our own eyes, instead of through the eyes of others... achieving empowerment and self-government... and finally, achieving a balance of independence and interdependence, and taking one’s place in a circle of true selves”. This statement is replete with arrogance and error.

First, self-esteem is not a birthright. Life is a gift from

God, not something we can demand. We are recipients of life, not a source of it, as the secular humanists would have us believe. In addition, a certain level of consciousness must be experienced for one to be self-conscious. These are both critical, according to the worldview of self-esteem. Steinem adds that we should look through our own eyes, not the eyes of others. This statement reveals the true heart of the self-esteem movement. It is a heart filled with selfishness, void of empathy for others. Next she uses the words “achieving empowerment”. This is clearly a self-made process by which an individual demands to be heard and thus gains power to rule over others. This is totally antithetical to real life experience, even in the secular world. One gains empowerment by other sources, outside of ourselves. These sources always have greater authority than the ones they promote.

The next phrase she uses is “self-governing”. This term has a distinct significance in the context of the local church, but not in the life of the individual. Even though the church is self-governing, it recognizes that it is under the authority of Jesus Christ. A church that is ruled by ego, has its reward, which is temporal, not eternal. We all have outside forces that govern us, whether it be government, schools, teachers, bosses, moms, dads, or police. If we do not reconcile ourselves to the leadership of others, not demanding self-empowerment, then we are in need of some serious therapy. We should never confuse self-esteem with leadership. Furthermore, she posits a balance between independence and inter-dependence. These terms militate against each other by virtue of their root meanings. What she is saying is that you can serve yourself and serve others at the same time. Matthew 6:24 says that you cannot serve two masters, so to be independent and interdependent at the same time is totally oxymoronic.

Lastly, Steinem says that we should “take our place in a circle of true selves”. This is psycho-babble at its best. It is a statement void of both meaning and understanding. The reason self-esteem is so desirable to the secular world is because it is a logical, alternative explanation for the sin problem, which every human struggles with every day. The unspoken theory of self-esteem is that we are not accountable for the condition in human experience that results in evil, wrong, or unlawful action. Rather, failure is due to low self-esteem., and the natural outcome of this low self-esteem is hopelessness and depression.

BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE: Part II, to be printed in the next issue of “The Discerner.”

SOURCES: “Self-Esteem”, Editor, Justin Healey, The Spinney Press; “History of Self-Esteem”, DLT, 1999/Webnotes; “Happiness is an Inside Job”, Steven Wilson, Christian advice.net; “Filling the World with Self-Esteem”, Steven Ward, Canadian Journal of Sociology.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Woody Bridell is originally from a small town in northern Minnesota. He received his post-secondary education at Pillsbury Baptist Bible College in Owatonna, MN and Central Baptist Theological Seminary of Minneapolis, MN. He has three grown children and three grandchildren.. He retired from QWEST Communications, after thirty two years, and is currently a Sales Engineer for a small Telecommunications Company in a Minneapolis suburb. He is busy with church work as an Adult Sunday School Teacher, Song Leader, Missions Committee Chairman and Choir Member.

BOOK REVIEW

SCRIPTURE ALONE

By James R. White

Reviewed by Rev. Ervin D. Ingebretson

Seldom have I been drawn to a book that exudes such passion for the desired goal as “Scripture Alone”, by James R. White. His statement of purpose affirms that the God-breathed Scriptures speak to every generation with the same soul-changing, truth-imparting power as they did from the beginning.

The author uses two phrases that reinforce the title of the book. One is a Latin phrase-‘sola scriptura’; the other is the ‘sufficiency of the Scriptures’, both of them are commanding titles.

To confirm his ability to write this treatise the author has been a pastor, a theologian, and an apologist. He uses an interesting style of writing in which he employs a conversation model. In any issue he desires to raise he engages in conversation with another person using an alias name. Mr. White always takes the positive approach to the topic. This style is used because of his frequent appearance in the public arena.

“Scripture Alone” is an excellent publication on exploring the Bible’s accuracy, authority and authenticity. It is the sole and sufficient infallible rule of faith for the Christian Church. The Scriptures are not in need of any supplement; their authority comes from their nature as God-breathed revelation. The Bible teaches all that is necessary for our salvation and is the standard by which all Christian behavior is measured.

The author lists numerous key texts to lay a foundation against the widest attacks on biblical sufficiency. Paul, in II Timothy 3:16-17, states that all Scripture is God-breathed. Nothing else is described this way. Before beginning his dissertation on false teachers, Peter lays the foundation for the divine nature of the Word of God (II Peter 1:20-21).

The author declares that how one views Scripture determines the rest of one’s theology.

The author lists issues such as inerrancy and exegesis as bringing God's truth to God's people. He cited a conference of Evangelicals meeting in Chicago that raised nineteen articles that affirm the infallibility and inerrancy of the Scriptures. He also stated that sound exegesis makes God speak rather than our speaking for Him.

The canon of Scripture is important to the author. Canon is based upon God's purposes, not upon the decision of any ecclesiastical body.

The author states that the "Scripture Alone", is not Scripture isolated. The Word is divine and the Spirit does not will it to be separate from His masterpiece. "Sola Scriptura" reveals with clarity 'all things necessary for God's glory, man's salvation, faith and life'. Scripture alone is the inerrant rule of church life, but the Evangelical Church has separated Scripture from its authoritative function. In practice, the church is too often guided by culture.

The author discusses the development of doctrine that affected the position of 'sola scriptura'. John Henry Cardinal Newman was a spokesperson for Roman Catholicism. He argued that Christian truth develops in the church consciousness over time. Some of the later dogmatic formulations such as papacy, Marian doctrines, etc. were implicitly found in the tradition of that time. The word-of-mouth transmission or unwritten tradition has been a strong issue raised by Catholics to supplement the Scriptures.

Frequently development of doctrine could be prompted by the activity of heresies. For instance, Arius, who denied the deity of Christ, began teaching his doctrine to anyone who would listen.

As the Gospel moved out into the world it encountered new cultures and philosophies. Often philosophers would overstep their bounds and respond to questions philosophically rather than in the language of Scripture.

Protestants and Catholics agree that doctrine develops but disagree on how it does. For Catholics the guiding force in the development is the Magisterium and the Church hierarchy. Roman apologists use the concept of 'development of doctrine' to emphasize these issues.

Another deviation from 'sola scriptura' is the experience of one saying, "The Lord spoke to me". This could lead to any

dogma if the saying was not prompted by Scripture.

The author presents an exceedingly important guide to understanding and practicing a faith that honors God and through which one learns doctrinal issues clearly. He has addressed in this work inerrancy, inspiration, canon, exegesis, etc. all of which he considers too difficult to discuss in today's comfortable church. It is all the more reason they should be discussed.

This book would be most helpful for all wanting to respond to followers of cult ministries where Scripture is falsely interpreted.

Through the author's devotion to God and His Word he has written a resourceful help to bring honor to God and to build confidence in His Word.

READERS WRITE:

Dear Rev. Laurence J. Sutherland; Just want you to know I have taken The Discerner since way back in the days of Rev. Dahlen and Rev. Eisele. Though I fail to "say so" often enough, let me say it is one of my most treasured reading. Just recently a man in my church shared his beliefs about the Jews which were in error. Through sharing your excellent informative articles on Israel and also the Dispensations, he has begun to understand God's purpose with His chosen people. The Discerner truly teaches and explains so very clearly. Thank you for your faithfulness to God's Word, to His honor and glory! Praising and thanking God for you, EN

Thank you for the letters and notes written to us. They encourage us greatly.

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May each of us continue to “search the scriptures” (Acts 17:11).

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