

March, 2004

A Basket of Figs

Dedicated to the idea that the decree makes the difference. Jeremiah 24:2,3

Self Esteem; Not Behavior

Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore shall they fall among them that fall: in the time of their visitation they shall be cast down, saith the LORD. --Jeremiah 8:12

She was a young mother in a conference with her child's teacher in the Christian school. She had never been married, but had produced three children from three different fathers, and was living with another man. She was having money problems because the men were not paying child support. She needed to talk to the teacher because her child was having trouble in school.

The teacher tried to be helpful and understanding. Hoping to encourage her the teacher said, "It is a difficult situation. The Lord is gracious. Sometimes it takes a while for us to work through the effects of sin." At the word "sin" the young mother lost it.

"My children are not the result of sin. They are beautiful children. I have a wonderful relationship with God, and the Lord knows the need that I have for men in my life."

This sad story illustrates just one of the spiritual problems that face the church in the United States today. There is no fear of God, no consciousness of sin, and no shame. Of course her children were gifts from God, but her shame was her own.

A number of years ago this writer reproved a young man in class who was behaving very badly. "Sit down," I said, "and quit acting like an idiot."

The next day his mother came to see me. "You embarrassed my boy," she said.

"No," I said. "He embarrassed himself. I just pointed it out. I didn't say he was an idiot; I said he was acting like one." I did then, and I do now, believe that there is such a thing as idiotic behavior that needs to be reprovved by those with authority.

The problem is that people do not mind acting foolishly. They just don't like to have it pointed out. The behavior does not embarrass them. Nowadays, when people are

caught in wicked behavior, their response is not to blush and be ashamed, but to tough it out and pretend they have done nothing wrong.

This is especially true of sexual sins. As Solomon wrote centuries ago:

Such *is* the way of an adulterous woman; she eateth, and wipeth her mouth, and saith, I have done no wickedness. --Proverbs 30:20

The important thing for the modern is to feel good, to accept himself. By intimidating those who would call us to better behavior, we shut ourselves off from repentance. Even in the highest places in our nation, those who hold high office are not ashamed of the most flagrant transgressions against nature. Do they blush? Of course not! They tough it out and admit no fault and no shame.

But God has not changed. The stiffened neck and the hardened heart and the seared conscience may suffice to face down men, but they will not face down God who resists the proud. "Therefore shall they fall among them that fall: in the time of their visitation they shall be cast down, saith the LORD," was the decree given by God through the prophet Jeremiah. Men can be bluffed; God cannot.

We do not purchase forgiveness by our repentance, for our forgiveness is the work of Christ on the Cross. But a hard heart is an unforgiven heart, for the love of God is shed into the hearts of those who belong to Christ, according to Romans 5:1,2. God's forgiveness melts the heart of the sinner, for it is powerful grace.

Look Out for the Chinese

In an article in the *Denver Post* on Wednesday, March 3, 2004, Associated Press writer Audra Ang reported that Communist China is changing its constitution to protect private property rights for the first time since the 1949 revolution. If this is true, and not an illusion, we should see a dramatic upsurge in Chinese economic activity and prosperity.

An important book, *Property and Freedom*, [Albert F. Knoff, New York, 1999. ISBN 0-375-40498-8] Richard Pipes shows the historic link between the guarantee of property rights and liberty and the rule of law. Also, *The Noblest Triumph* by Tom Bethell [St. Martin's Press, New York, 1998. ISBN 0-312-21083-3], shows the link between prosperity and property rights.

For instance, the deprivation of parts of Africa where it is forbidden to harvest the tusks

of elephants results in the people treating them like nuisances, resulting in a decline in their population. And they are a nuisance, for they can “tear the roof off huts and village grain-storage units, and consume an entire season’s food supply on the spot.” [p. 286]. If they belong to no one, then no one cares about them, except Ralph Nader, and he is far away in America, running for President. In places like Zimbabwe, however, people can own the elephants, fence them in, harvest their tusks, and keep them from harm. The result is that the elephant population in Zimbabwe has soared. In East Africa, however, all commercial use of the elephant was forbidden. The President of Kenya burned \$3 million worth of tusks on TV. One result was an international ban on tusks. Another result was that the population of East African elephants declined from 866,000 in 1979 to 404,000 in 1989. The response of liberals: they banned ivory throughout the world. The elephant was now useless except for tree huggers and other assorted nincompoops.

Read Tom Bethell’s book. The chapter on property rights in the Arabian world is in itself worth the price of the book. Robbers despoil their own people and then blame their prosperous neighbors who do not steal their people’s property. It’s an old, old story.

Watch out for the Chinese. Maybe they are beginning to understand economics.

Jury Duty

I confess that I have made fun of it for many years. For one thing, I didn’t think that I would ever have to serve. I thought that if I stated that I was a minister and a teacher of theology that there was no chance that I would ever be called. I was wrong.

I spent four of the first five days in March in jury duty. It wasn’t a high profile case, except for the very sad family and few friends who sat in the courtroom the last day and heard the guilty verdict on all four of the counts. It will not even rate a line or two in the local papers, I fear.

The woman was an addict, the girlfriend of an operator of a meth lab. Of course, if she had good judgment there would have been no case, and I would have been doing something else that week. But she was an addict and up to her ears in complicity and aiding and abetting. There are hundreds of labs in Colorado Springs, I hear, and they are a scourge to the city and a shame to us. But that is not the subject of this article.

We spent one day hearing the evidence and more than a day in deliberation. I learned

much more about the illegal manufacture of drugs than I wanted to know, and will never look at a book of paper matches the same way again. I was impressed with the quality of the men and women who decided the case. The youngest looked like a boy in high school, but I know he was at least twenty one. I and an elderly lady were the oldest, but I didn't ask her age. I think one man was a Roman Catholic because his kids went to "Catholic school." I suspect that no one in the room understood the Christian origin of our liberties and freedoms and probably could not have been persuaded that such was the case. But for those three days it didn't matter in that room. No one complained about the time and the work.

The overwhelming spirit in that room was the desire to work as hard, stay as long as was necessary to see that the defendant received every benefit of the doubt. Everyone wanted to uphold the law. It was hard work. The detectives had not made it easy for us, nor had the overworked district attorney's office. The evidence was all there, but we had to work very hard to put it together. But they were all fair and hardworking. We were all Americans and proud of the system. I am prouder now.

What a wonderful system! For more than three days, we worked hard until twelve heads agreed that the woman was guilty. We pieced the evidence together. There were strong disagreements at times. Emotions were strong, and the language was strong at times, but it was a very good thing that happened those days. It was the American justice system at work and it worked very well. I think that such trials are going on all over America, and that most of them work as well. It ought not be easy to convict.

Sadly, the poor woman will spend a great deal of time in jail. She was poor, of course, and had no charlatan or slick Harvard lawyer to enable her to evade the law. Her attorney was court appointed. But she got a fair shake in Colorado Springs. I hope that Kobe Bryant gets as good a shake.

Scamming Again

First he scammed the *Old Grey Lady*, the *New York Times*. Now he is at it again, aided and abetted by Katie Couric. I'm speaking of Jayson Blair. Even as I write this, he is being interviewed about his new book, "Burning Down My Master's House." Answer me this? Why does Martha Stewart get convicted and perhaps go to jail for lying about a stock trade when Jayson Blair, whose lying makes Martha an amateur

indeed, get to scam his book on Dateline NBC? Isn't this a strange world? But of course, who every accused the liberal news media of having ethics? Did you ever stop to realize that the mainstream media is the most sophisticated means in the history of the world to enable corrupt people to break the 9th Commandment in a grand way?

The Eighth Commandment, Too

Thy silver is become dross, thy wine mixed with water: Isaiah 1:22

Have you checked a pound of coffee lately? It isn't a pound, you know. Or did you know? I keep old coffee cans on the mess I call my work bench in the garage. Assorted screws, nails, fasteners, etc., are placed into the old cans so that I can pretend that I am orderly. I am reformed, and so I feel guilty about the disorder, so I keep trying. But I am enough Irish that disorder doesn't really vex me. But back to the coffee cans.

I have a great many cans marked 13 oz., presumably because they once held 13 oz. of coffee. I have several that are 23 oz. and a few 26 oz. and 39 oz. If I remember correctly, you once could get a pound of coffee [16 oz.] or two pounds of coffee in a can [32 oz.], and maybe there were three pound cans [48 oz.]. When did the pound can become 13 ounces or the two pound can 26 oz or 23 oz.?

It happened gradually, of course. The coffee companies spent a great deal of money advertising that their beans were "mountain grown," or "picked by hand" or some such thing. They never said, "Oh, by the way, our can that looks like a pound can is really only 15 oz., or 14 oz., or 13 oz. I don't ever remember seeing that advertisement.

It happened in church, too. The new preacher appeared to be like the old. He had the same degree, was labeled the same. You really had to look at the fine print to know that he was much lighter than the old kind. Didn't preach the old truth, and didn't call men to faith. He didn't really believe the Bible, but was very good in knowing why your Bible wasn't any good. He seemed to know a great deal, but didn't pray much or know much about what the Bible says about God. But he was a jolly good fellow.

In Judah the silver was mixed with dross, rather like our sandwich coins today. The

wine was mixed with water, so that it seemed that you were getting the same amount for the price you paid. It is crooked to make people think they are getting the same stuff when they are not. The law forbade Israel to have “divers” weights.

Since writing this article I checked the current coffee cans in our kitchen. Four cans all the same size. A Safeway French Roast, 11.5 oz. Safeway Special Roast, 13 oz. Folgers Special Roast 11.5 oz. Yuban 100% Colombian Decaf, 12 oz.

In the old days they were called coin clippers, for dishonest men would shave off a bit of the edge of a gold or silver coin. So, gold and silver coins were fluted on the edge. They still are, for we like to pretend that we haven’t debased our coinage. Rehoboam made brass shields to replace the gold ones that Solomon made that were taken away by the king of Egypt. Men do like a show to pretend all is well. Shame, shame!

Dead Gods and Dead People

- 4 Their idols *are* silver and gold, the work of men’s hands.
- 5 They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not:
- 6 They have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not:
- 7 They have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat.
- 8 They that make them are like unto them; *so is* every one that trusteth in them. –Psalm 115:4-8

Dead people worship dead gods with dead faith, all the while doing dead works. They are promoted by dead prophets, who are as dead as they people they preach to, aiding and abetting the deadness all around.

Dead gods have very lively religious rites. The prophets of the dead danced around the golden calves and the altars to Baal. People imagine that if the music is loud, the latte is good, and they weep at the images of dead gods, all will be well and no will notice that the gods are dead. But loud music and energetic rites will not make dead gods live.

The energy is supplied by the dead people. Dead gods are given artificial life by the people who make and worship them, for idolaters worship themselves most of all and use the idols as a projection of themselves, because they do not want to be thought of as self-worshippers. When Israel danced around the golden calf they pretended to be worshipping the God who had brought them out of Egypt.

The worshippers of dead gods tell themselves that success is all in the mind; that they

can think positively; that they can be anything they imagine themselves to be. But sooner or later reality will catch up, and the party will be over. Promises, promises, promises: men who follow the empty promises of dead gods sooner or later turn with fury upon them.

- 19 And they shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, for fear of the LORD, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth.
- 20 In that day a man shall cast his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which they made *each one* for himself to worship, to the moles and to the bats;
- 21 To go into the clefts of the rocks, and into the tops of the ragged rocks, for fear of the LORD, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth.
- 22 Cease ye from man, whose breath *is* in his nostrils: for wherein is he to be accounted of? --
Isaiah 2:19-22

Lying Images

- 15 Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves; for ye saw no manner of similitude on the day *that* the LORD spake unto you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire:
- 16 Lest ye corrupt *yourselves*, and make you a graven image, the similitude of any figure,
--Deuteronomy 4:15,16

Because God is a Spirit, He must be worshipped in the heart, not with the senses. He is invisible and cannot be seen with the senses of the body, but must be sensed with the soul. "Taste and see that the Lord is good," does not apply to the physical senses, but to the soul. Because the natural man is of the earth and earthy, he desires the creature and worships the creature that he can see and feel more than the God whom he cannot see and hear.

Christ appeared on this earth in a physical body, not to teach us to worship the physical, but so that He could die for our sins. But even Jesus on the cross is not to become an object of worship, as if we are edified in a participation in all the imagined gory details of His horrible death. The details are not set forth in Scripture, and God Himself darkened that hour as if it is something that is hidden from us.

The Christ that we worship is the One who is now exalted in glory, after rising from the dead victorious over death and hell. "Though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we *him* no more," is the way the Apostle Paul put it. [2Cor. 5:16] Although it is critical that we understand that the incarnation was real, the death of Christ in the flesh was real, His ascension into heaven as a man was real, and His coming again to judge the world is real, yet we do not worship a man, for the One who

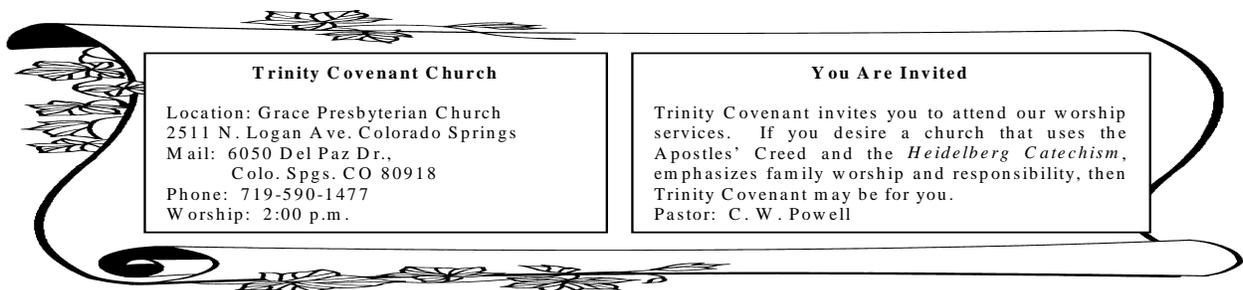
came in the flesh is none other but the Son of the Living God, begotten of God, eternal in the Godhead.

Because of this, we have no physical description of Jesus in the Bible. Art was very sophisticated in that day and God could have commissioned a painting of Christ to leave to the church. He did not, and He did not leave it to us. We are not to remember Him on the cross and no picture or description of that is given to us, other than the fact that it occurred. The only details given are those which fulfilled the Scriptures.

We know Him by faith in the soul and mind. We participate in his death and remember Him, not in carnal images, but in the communion of the Lord's Supper. "As often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, you do show the Lord's death till he come." It is dying to the world, putting off the old man, and putting on the new man that we show the Lord's death, not weeping at violent visual images. The Reformers rightly condemned the crucifix and forbade it in their churches, for we do not worship a dead Christ. Those who knew Him in the flesh did not recognize Him after His resurrection.

As Calvin wrote on 2Cor. 5:16: "The meaning is — 'Though Christ lived for a time in this world, and was known by mankind in those things that have to do with the condition of the present life, he must now be known in another way — spiritually, so that we may have no worldly thoughts respecting him.'"

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<p style="text-align: center;">Trinity Covenant Church</p> <p>Location: Grace Presbyterian Church 2511 N. Logan Ave. Colorado Springs Mail: 6050 Del Paz Dr., Colo. Spgs. CO 80918 Phone: 719-590-1477 Worship: 2:00 p.m.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">You Are Invited</p> <p>Trinity Covenant invites you to attend our worship services. If you desire a church that uses the Apostles' Creed and the <i>Heidelberg Catechism</i>, emphasizes family worship and responsibility, then Trinity Covenant may be for you. Pastor: C. W. Powell</p>
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