

# A Basket of Figs

April, 1999

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

## Isn't There Enough of "Postism"?

It's all very chic, of course. There is postmodernism and postconstructionism. Some speak of postcolonialism. If you are **really** up to day, you pontificate about post-Christianity, or even "Post-post-Christianity! [See "The Rage of Postism, and a Chinese Scholar's Dissent" in *Academic Questions*, National Association of Scholars, Winter, 1998-99, Vol. 12, No. 1].

It is certain that the "world passes away, and the lust thereof," [I John 2:17], but humanists are engaging in wishful thinking when they speak of a "Post-Christian Era."

Earthly empires come and go. Nations that once had energetic and talented leaders lose their vigor and their creativity. Rulers and kings die. Natural resources are wasted and depleted. Trade patterns change, and technology changes, with advantages accruing to new nations and new races.

Christianity does not have those disadvantages. Humanists continue to err concerning Christianity because they just don't "get it." Christianity is a kingdom whose King is in heaven. He will never die, nor pass on His authority to another, because He is at the right hand of God His Father. Because Jesus Christ is God, He has life in Himself (John 5:26) and cannot grow old or lose vigor and energy.

The resources of Christ's kingdom are not carnal, but are spiritual. They are constantly being renewed. New and energetic leaders constantly arise. From time to time, the church may become enmeshed in human philosophies and scientific theories which may disconnect her from her Head, but because her

head is in Heaven, new leaders and teachers arise who call the church back to loyalty to Jesus Christ, and she rises as from the ashes, to the dismay and confusion of her enemies.

This is something that Jesus must have meant when He said, “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away” (Matt. 24:35). It is easier for the heavens to pass away and be no more, for the stars to fall from the sky and the immense forces that hold the universe together to dissolve and fade away into the nothingness from whence they came; easier for the everlasting hills to melt down, fall into the sea, and pass into that same nothingness than for the words of Jesus Christ to pass away and be lost.

Because of the immense and rich spiritual resources that are contained in the words of Jesus Christ, His church cannot pass away. There will be no “Post-Christian Era.” There is a post-pagan, Post-Nazi era, a Post-Communist era, and there will be a post-evolutionary era and a post-America era, but the kingdom of Christ endures forever. Amen! and Amen! Humanism should give up their idle wishful thinking and get in touch with reality.

Hebrews 1:8 But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of thy kingdom.

## **It Isn't Clear?**

Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. 2:2 For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; 2:3 How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; --Hebrews 2:1-3

This author has taught school for more than forty years. I have taught kindergartners and Oxford Ph.D's. One amazing thing that I would not have suspected when I began to teach is how predictable students are, on every level of education.

One thing a teacher can be certain of is that assignments must be clear. Somehow or another, students think that they have an excuse not to do an assignment if it is not perfectly clear. Ambiguity is a tractor-trailer rig that students will ride through the barricades in order to avoid responsibility. This is the reason that years ago I would hand out to high school students exactly what was expected of them in their classes, have them sign the paper, and have their parents sign it. Even so, some parents would come in and claim they had no idea of what their students was expected to do. In seminary, we attempt to put the requirements into a syllabus.

“I didn’t know the paper was due today.” “I didn’t know we had to do a paper.” “I didn’t know how many words the paper had to be.” And so it goes. It doesn’t matter how clear the assignment is, some will think that they can escape responsibility by attacking it.

Lawyers make a great deal of money doing this. It is impossible to write a law or a contract that a clever lawyer will be unable to void. Men pretend that words are unclear, that they did not know this or that when they signed a paper.

Years ago, it was necessary for me to expel a number of students from a school because they were using drugs. They pretended that we were unjust because they did not know that they would be expelled for using drugs, even though both they and their parents had signed documents to that effect. They pretended that they did not understand.

Because God is a most perfect being, He must judge the world. There is no darkness at all in Him, and when His perfect and most wise plan and vision for the universe are fulfilled, He will remove from His kingdom everything that defiles or corrupts it. He has said this very plainly in many places in the Scripture. Even in the consciousness of men, He has written His laws (Romans 2) so that they are without excuse. Wicked transgressors of the law of God know that they are worthy of death, but not only continue in their corruptions, but rejoice in others who do so also. (Romans 1).

But even though God has spoken so plainly and clearly, men pretend that they do not have sufficient knowledge. Even the rich man in hell pretended this: “Go and tell my brothers,” he whined, indirectly blaming God for not giving sufficient warning. “They have the law and the prophets,” Abraham said. Even the Old Testament Scriptures contained sufficient information to keep a man out of hell; how much more the blazing light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Just as criminals hire expensive lawyers to corrupt and avoid the clear penalties of civil law, so ungodly men spend their wealth and time to corrupt and avoid the clear teachings of Scripture. They pay preachers and theologians handsome salaries and give them great honor if they can show that the Scriptures do not mean what they say, and that the wicked will not surely die and the righteous will not be rewarded. “There are so many different opinions,” the monotony goes. Solomon nailed it centuries ago in Proverbs 26:12 “Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? there is more hope of a fool than of him.” The man wise in his own eyes would rather blame God, than accept responsibility for his life.

Because God is wise and good, and will certainly judge the world, He must have communicated plainly and clearly. Men harden their hearts against the light and pretend it isn't shining, but they give themselves away every time they open their mouths and speak of truth and error, right and wrong, good and evil. There is coming a day in which God will judge the world by Jesus Christ: Acts 17:31 Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.

## **Immutability: Unconditional Love**

It used to be that an important quest for the religious soul was , “How can I experience God.” In modern, more self-centered times, the question has become "How does God experience us?"

Apart from the obvious thought that it would be impossible for us to know such a thing even if it happened, it might be most important to revisit the classical doctrines of the Christian faith, one of which is the immutability of God. As

**James put it: 1:16** Do not err, my beloved brethren. **1:17** Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. **Because God cannot change, the whole question of experience is irrelevant. Experience implies change, and God doesn't have any of that.**

This does not mean that God is not aware of everything about us. Of course He is. Even the hairs on our head are numbered, but it does not mean that God counted them. He knows because He knows intuitively, not by experience like we do. His knowledge is unchanging: He does not remember, nor does He forget, knowing all things all at once in an eternal knowledge.

Jesus, of course, with respect to His humanity, experienced life and grew in wisdom and stature. His human nature was subject to all the changes that our human nature knows, only without sin, and without any change in His divine nature. This is the mystery of godliness, according to Paul in I Timothy **3:16** And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.

Even more important, perhaps, is that the immutability of God is necessary if His love is to be without condition. If anything we did could change God, then He would have an ax to grind in the good things He does for us. He would give, hoping for return, which He has forbidden to us. But the truth of Scripture is this, God is unchanging and transcendent, beyond experience. He knows and rules all things, but is not affected by any of the things He has made. His love and goodness are therefore without condition, for there is nothing that any of us can do for Him.

I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; **5:45** That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. **5:46** For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? **5:47** And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? **5:48** Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. –Matt. 5:44-48

# Vanity, Vanity

For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. 8:20 For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, --Romans 8:19, 20.

There is a purpose for creation, but because of sin, everything is out of whack. Because of sin, creation has been made subject to vanity, which means emptiness or meaninglessness. God created everything for a purpose, but because of sin, that purpose has gone awry.

This is evident in man's own body. Certainly, man was not created to be ruled by his passions and his lusts. The body was to be the servant of the mind, not the mind of the body. But men use their minds in order to satisfy the desires of the body, instead of using their bodies to accomplish the purposes of their minds.

The alcoholic or drug-crazed person is the perfect example. He uses all of his wits to get more booze, or more drugs. Those drunken on sex do the same thing. The reason and the abilities of the mind are perverted from their created purpose to the vanity of serving the body.

According to Romans 12:1,2 acceptable service to God is from the mind, with the body offered as a living sacrifice to perform this "reasonable" service. But sin corrupts it all, and man is alienated in his mind from the service of God to the service of the creature.

The result is emptiness and more emptiness, described by the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 4:17-19 This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, 4:18 Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: 4:19 Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.

The only solution is to be restored to a sound mind through Jesus Christ, as Paul goes on to say in Ephesians 4:22-24: If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus: 4:22 That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is

corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; 4:23 And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; 4:24 And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

In Jesus Christ, we are restored to soundness of mind, so that we can begin to seek the Lord with our whole mind, and heart, and soul, and the body and its desires no longer rule us, but our members become instruments of righteousness for the glory of God. There is no other way.

## Thinking Up Something

Do they not err that devise evil? but mercy and truth shall be to them that devise good. –Prov. 14:22

I was only a small boy in southern Oregon that summer long ago, and my cousin had come to spend it with us. He and I were quite a combination, and things always seemed to happen when we got together.

My father owned some forty acres of pastureland where he raised a few cows and chickens. The back half of our forty was not irrigated and mostly consisted for dry grass and manzanita brush. One boring summer day we had what we thought was a very good plan. We were fascinated with fire, and thought it would be exciting to take some matches from the kitchen and build a little fire.

I remember it as a hot July afternoon, and we first thought we would climb up into our barn and build our fire in an old coffee can. At the last minute, sitting on top of the hay that had been cut that spring and loaded into our barn, we decided that the smoke might very well be seen from the house. [Without a doubt it would have been seen! If we had followed through on that phase of our plan, there is no doubt in my mind that these words would not be written today. What was it that stayed our foolish, childish hands? Some might call it luck—I do not think so.]

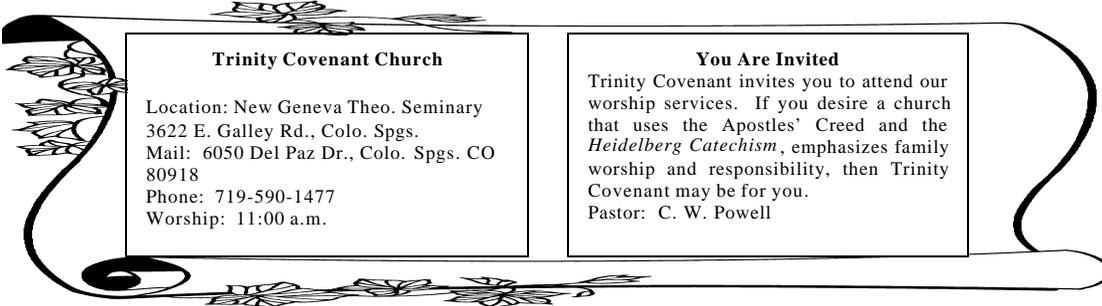
Climbing down out of the barn, we made our way into the middle of the back twenty acres, found a clump of manzanita brush, put a few dry sticks into our coffee can, and lit our fire. It seemed to explode! Panicking, my cousin picked up the can, hoping to turn it over and put the fire out. It was hot, of course, and

he dropped it, scattering fire everywhere. Now the brush exploded, the wind caught the blaze and it raced off across the field. We ran for home. I still had some matches in my hand. They must have brushed up against my jeans as I ran, for they caught on fire and burned my hand. I dropped them, of course, and new blazes caught in the dry grass and raced off parallel with the others. It was quite a scene.

Tears running down my face, I raced for home. I heard my cousin calling, “Wait, wait. Let’s think up something.” I was too frightened to think of imaginative lying—at least on that occasion, although my imagination was plenty fertile on other occasions. We raced home, told the truth, and the county fire department spent the next couple of days putting out the flames, which consumed the greater part of a hundred acres, including some of our neighbor’s dry oak wood that he had cut and stacked.

“Wait, wait. Let’s think up something.” Man’s imagination is captive to his heart, and can be either an instrument for good, or an instrument for evil. How wonderful is that imagination, when it is the slave of God, devising good for His glory, thinking of ways to do good and alleviate pain and misery! How awful is that imagination which devises false gods and covers its way with lies and deceit! The wise man in Proverbs 14:22 says that the first is blessed of God, the other is in error.

We will send *A Basket of Figs* free of charge to anyone who requests it. We will be glad to send it to your friends and relatives. It is our desire that these little papers be used of the Lord to bear witness of the truth as it is in Christ. Our only request is that they be read; you do not even have to agree with everything! Unless otherwise indicated, all articles are written by Pastor Powell, and they may be free duplicated as long as duly credited. We do not solicit funds, nor will we give or sell our mailing list to anyone.



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