

A Basket of Figs

May, 2000

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

Yes!! I Have an Immortal Soul!

“For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” Mark 8:36

The *Second Helvetic Confession (Chapter VII)* puts it this way: “We also affirm that man consists of two different substances in one person: an immortal soul which, when separated from the body, neither sleeps nor dies, and a mortal body which will nevertheless be raised up from the dead at the last judgment in order that then the whole man, either in life or in death, abides forever.”

Of course, no man is immortal in the same sense that God is immortal (I Timothy 6:16)). God has life in Himself (John 5:26), needing no support system, but God created man to exist forever. God was not trifling when He created man, and endowed the man with the wonderful gifts of knowledge, understanding, and holiness.

As a small boy, I remember when the realization came to me, it penetrated to the very depths of my soul. I was riding on an old yellow school bus, going to public school [Yes, God even can reach the souls of children in the public schools]. The thought came to me, that I was going to live somewhere forever.

I am sure that the influence of gospel preachers that I heard as a boy helped the truth to sink home. Some of those preachers I knew as a boy knew how to preach, and they knew that they had God’s word in their hands, in their old, thumb-worn Bibles. Some of them could preach the paint off the walls. Some of them, I know now, were “only” Bible-school trained, but they knew there was a heaven and they were also certain of hell, and they knew how to call people to go to heaven and to stay out of hell. They also knew that faith in Jesus Christ was the way to go to heaven. The older I get, the more thankful I am for those old preachers, all of them now gone to heaven, I am sure.

They didn't know much about the latest trends in theology or social paradigms. They wouldn't have known what a paradigm was. They didn't analyze trends and try to get out in front of the trends. They didn't much care what the mad world was clamoring for at any particular time.

But they were relevant in a way that I have only gradually come to realize. Human nature is the same in all ages, in all societies. The gospel does not adapt itself to the paradigms of the day—it changes and transforms the paradigms. The universals of the Gospel can speak to the whole world, even to a small, ignorant, boy growing up in Southern Oregon.

I know now that it was the Holy Spirit working in my heart, causing me to understand and believe the message of the Bible. It was many years before I came to peace in my heart, and was assured that the blood of Jesus took all my sins away. But I knew very early that there was more to me than a body, that I was far more than what I ate and drank. The power of the Gospel overcame all the humanistic claptrap I was being fed everyday in the public school classroom [Yes, humanism was rampant even that long ago].

The writer of Hebrews put it this way, “For the word of God *is* quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and *is* a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” Hebrews 4:12

This writer is fully convinced that we can only persuade people of what we are convinced of ourselves. If we refuse to ask ourselves the tough questions, and are too lazy to seek out the answers from the Bible, we will be increasingly impotent in our witness to the world.

The Apostle Peter put it this way: But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and *be* ready always to *give* an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: 1 Peter 3:15 We must begin with “sanctifying the Lord God in our hearts,” to treasure and love His word, to seek His true worship in spirit and in truth. It is in the spirit of meekness and fear that men are convinced, not by the power of our wisdom or by the force of our arguments.

Because I have an immortal soul, there was something in me that connected to the Gospel. I was not a rock or a stone. I was not an animal. I was not a computer to be programmed by humanistic educators. My soul cried out for the Living God, whom I only could see dimly.

I know now that many of the preachers I heard were defective in their theological understanding. But their confidence in the Scriptures and their preaching of the Scriptures transcended their theology. What connected to my soul was not their theology, for I do not remember much of what they said. But the Scriptures burned into my very soul and changed me forever.

Not to a rock, not to an animal, not to a tree, but to a ruler of the Jews, a man alienated in his soul from his God, were the words of Christ spoken: “Ye must be born again.”

Has God No Respect?

Thus saith the LORD, thy redeemer, and he that formed thee from the womb, I am the LORD that maketh all things; that stretcheth forth the heavens alone; that spreadeth abroad the earth by myself; That frustrateth the tokens of the liars, and maketh diviners mad; that turneth wise men backward, and maketh their knowledge foolish; --Isaiah 44:24,25

What if God had made the knowledge of Himself so plain and clear, that only a person who hated God would refuse to see it? Would God try to explain it to him? Or would God's judgment be on the man himself.

Because God is a Spirit, it would be reasonable that this judgment would be primarily upon man's spiritual or non-physical characteristics.

This is exactly what the Bible says that God has done. He turns men's knowledge into foolishness, and frustrates their predictions, and turns wise men backwards.

Such men cannot understand the truth. They look at the data, but they are blind as moles, because of the darkening of their minds.

"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." --Ephesians 4:17-19.

God will allow such men to follow their own delusions. "Ephraim is joined to idols: let him alone. Their drink is sour: they have committed whoredom continually: her rulers with shame do love, Give ye. The wind hath bound her up in her wings, and they shall be ashamed because of their sacrifices." --Hosea 4:17-19

It is a very dangerous thing to turn away from the truth. The eye that stares unblinkingly at the sun will soon be unable to see anything.

God owes the rebellious nothing at all, and is certainly not bound to their vanity and folly. Though rebellious men refuse to see the difference between their dead gods and the One True and Living God, God does not surrender His Mind to their folly. Instead, His mind is perfectly clear, and declares their minds "unapproved" or reprobate. (Romans 1:28) God sends them " strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness." --2 Thess. 2:11,12.

What hope is there for a man who has been darkened in his mind and thought, unable to see the truth that is manifest before his very eyes? What if the evidence he observes makes him certain that his lie is the truth, because of God's judgment upon his own mind? How could he possibly deliver himself? Matthew 6:23 "But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great *is* that darkness!"

The hope is only in a light from without, the light of Jesus Christ in the Gospel. This light, though the preaching of the Gospel comes from without the man, illuminating his darkness and transforming him. This is his hope, and there is no other.

Words of Life

A true witness delivereth souls: but a deceitful witness speaketh lies.
Proverbs 14:25

One day in the presence of his enemies, Jesus said that if they would keep his sayings they would never see death. They were astounded at this. "Abraham is dead, and the prophets are dead. Who do you think you are?"

Jesus replied, "If I am honoring myself, it is nothing. But the One you say is your god, is the Father who honors me. You don't know him, but I do. If I said that I didn't know Him, I would be a liar like you are. But I know Him and keep His sayings."
[John 8:51-55]

Christ continued, "Abraham rejoiced to see my day and was glad." Now his enemies were in a dither. "You aren't fifty years old yet. How have you seen Abraham?"

Jesus nailed them: "I am speaking the truth. Before Abraham was, I AM."

Jesus certainly believed that words are important. What a person says does make a difference. Jesus said that if we become his disciples, we will know the truth, and the truth will make us free. He could not and would not deny the truth or lie to them.

The reason that Jesus could and would not lie, is that He is God, and God cannot deny Himself.

The only foundation for knowing and speaking the truth is that God exists and cannot deny Himself. Things are what they are because God created them and they cannot deny themselves just as God cannot deny himself.

A rabbit doesn't have to go around wearing a sign saying "I am a rabbit." His rabbitness is displayed in everything it does. The true reality of a rabbit is hidden from us just as the essence of God is hidden from us, but the outward manifestation of the truth cannot escape us.

We do not know the mysterious operation of the Holy Spirit that makes a man a true Christian. But because God cannot deny Himself, neither can His work deny itself. The new man in Christ manifests himself in many ways. It is not necessary for a Christian to wear a sign any more than it is for a rabbit. The truth of his Christianity will be displayed in all that he does. He will do true Christian things just as a rabbit does true rabbit things.

People lie because they hate God and they hate the world He made. They want to substitute their dreams for the hard realities of sin, salvation, eternal judgment, and the cross of Christ. They do not want to live in the world of God's reality, because that means acknowledging that the world lies under the wrath of God because of the sin of Adam, and that the only hope for salvation lies in the cross.

Lies do not deliver souls; faithful witness does. A gospel of convenience, wealth, and self-esteem does not deliver souls from death and hell. Jesus came to save people from their sins, and He knew that salvation lies in knowing the true God. (John 17). Therefore He did not lie. He knew that people would not think He was "nice." He knew that His words would offend theologically "nice" people. He did not go out of His way to offend--indeed, He was the meekest and most inoffensive of men. Liars, however, are offended by the truth because they love darkness. That's why they hated Jesus of Nazareth.

The wolf puts on sheep's clothing, making pretenses in order to catch the unwary. But the wolf cannot deny his true nature any more than God can deny Himself. A wolf is a wolf is a wolf. Putting on sheep's clothing will not change him into a sheep. His wolfishness will betray him at every step, except to those who are blinded by their own pretenses and self-deceit.

Jeremiah 13:23 Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? *then* may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil. A man's race is genetic, and so is a leopard's spots. It would require a fundamental change, possible only by God, to make such a change in the nature of a being, on the same order as turning water into wine, or feeding a multitude with five loaves and two fish.

We would call a man a fool if he took a cow into his home and tried to teach it to purr and to catch mice. A cow cannot deny itself. It is just as foolish to try to teach a man

to be a good Christian if He has not been born again. Salvation does not come from teaching a man to be good or to believe good things, but from regeneration and sanctification of the Spirit. His nature cannot deny itself, but will bring forth evil fruit, for an evil tree cannot bring forth good fruit.

"Ye must be born again," Jesus said, and He told the truth always. The new birth is the planting of a new nature in a man by the power of the Word and Spirit, and is the work of Jesus Christ alone.

18 Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; 19 But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: 20 Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, 21 Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God. 22 Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently: 23 Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever. (I Peter 1:18-23)

What wonderful words are in this passage: "redeemed," "precious blood," "faith," "hope," "unfeigned love," "pure heart." The apostle is not speaking of a person who is trying to be something other than he is, but a person who has been redeemed from all phoniness and pretence, so that he can truly be himself, and that "self" is a child of God by faith in Jesus Christ.

This is the true deliverance of souls, and it only comes from faithful witness.

This and That

- Did you ever notice how intolerant humanism is? Let a baseball pitcher say a few impolitic things against the creed of humanism, and he will be suspended, sent to "sensitivity training" and become the subject of endless talk-shows. But the church is squeamish about disciplining ministers to have the care of souls. Go figure.
- Barbi says that "Math is hard." Yes it is. And so is theology. Can you reduce

the theology of John Calvin to a bumper sticker? Or a thirty-second sound bite? We wouldn't want a lazy Barbi to build our bridges, and we shouldn't attend lazy preachers. But then, going to heaven is not as important as building bridges, is it?

- Hebrews 5:13, 14 For every one that useth milk *is* unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, *even* those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. Knowing good and evil is not easy. Children do not know it naturally, and neither do grownups. We must mature in our Christian faith and have all of our “senses” exercised to discern it, and virtue must be practiced. “Senses” here means all of our spiritual faculties: reason, faith, knowledge. The writer of Hebrews was frustrated with his hearers, because they didn't know anything about Melchizedek. Imagine, a Jew not knowing much about a person to whom Abraham had paid tithes! Melchizedek must have represented something important, but they were too childish to understand.
 - Jesus reproved a disciple when that disciple drew his sword to defend Christ on the way to the cross. “Don't you know I could pray and have twelve legions of angels?” One angel would have been enough. Angels are not soft little things with fluffy wings, and neither are they women. [Please do not get your theology from television]. One angel destroyed 185,000 Assyrians in one night (2 Kings 19:35). One stopped the mouths of lions. But then, soft, effeminate theology can only abide soft, fluffy angels.
 - Even Jesus did not validate Himself. He opened the Scriptures and validated Himself from the Scriptures (See Luke 24). This didn't mean it was easy for the disciples. Their eyes had to be opened to understand.
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