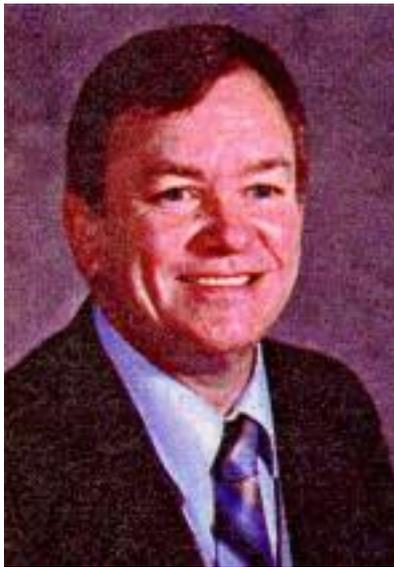


Volume6, Number 2 March/April 1995



### **A TRIBUTE TO OUR FATHER**

(The following tribute was prepared by Travers Van der Merwe's two older children, Dalih and Derek. It was read by Derek at his father's funeral service.)

On behalf of my family I would like to thank everyone that has come to this service today in honor of my father, and if you have ever seen my Dad preach you would know that he would not approve of this service being any shorter than one hour and a half to two hours.

My Dad lived every moment of his life with a deep passion and enthusiasm for the things of God and his family, not much else seemed to matter. His God and his family were the two things in which there was never any room for compromise.

His most used items were his worn out Bible and pairs of broken and taped reading glasses. Through his whole life he always considered himself a student of the Word - forever reading and learning. Through the years at the different churches he pastored he never wanted to be the only person to participate; instead he always wanted people to share in his passion for God and His Word.

Many times our family would be sitting in the car driving somewhere and my Dad would be quietly thinking about something. Twenty miles down the road - and about ten miles past his exit - he would finish his thought and have no clue where he was. We would ask him, "Dad, what were you thinking?" He would always say, "When I think about things of God, nothing else matters."

My Dad's favorite was the book of Revelation. Every day he would watch Headline News for hours on end. Headline News would repeat the same stories every half hour continuously throughout the day. After about the fourth time in a row of watching the same news event you would finally ask him if he was starting to go as crazy as you were. Every time he would respond. "You never know when prophecy is going to be fulfilled, it could happen at any moment and I don't want to miss it."

With this same passion he loved his family. After God, his family was the most important thing in his life through the accomplishments of his children. Nothing gave him more joy than to see us achieve. From the first day that each one of us came home from school he would sit us down and ask us, "What did we do that day at school?" A simple "It was fine," or "We did nothing," was never good enough. We had to plan on at least a half hour to outline every part of our day. If we ever said we got an "A" on any subject that would be the highlight of the week. Dalih and I never gave him too many highlights in High School, but Charissa is compensating for us both.

The cancer never destroyed my Dad's passion for life. With every blow the disease dealt, his fight would become stronger. When he could only walk he wanted to run. When he could only sit he wanted to walk. When he could only lay down he wanted to sit up. When he couldn't sit up he wanted to roll from side to side. When he couldn't roll anymore and could only lay in one position, God took him home. He fought till the end and his body failed before his mind and heart.

Through the physical battle he was fighting, he always honored God. After a period of six weeks of him not talking and us assuming he had brain damage, he woke up one morning a couple of weeks ago and calling my name. Surprised he was talking I jumped out of bed and ran to his side. Through the pain he said. "Derek, Derek - God is taking care of me - this is a very special situation to God." His passion for God could not be destroyed by the disease.

I don't know how many of you have heard my Dad's testimony; however, in it he tells how when he first became a Christian he was running, singing and rejoicing in the rain all the way back to his home. About a month ago I had a dream that my dad was running, singing, and rejoicing again, but this time it was in heaven.

Now there is nothing to stop his passions. He can read and learn and not worry about his broken glasses. He can run and not worry about a disease and pain, and the Headline News he will be watching will always be up to date.

For those of you that might not know the God that my Dad knew: Remember, when the storms come and you are stripped of your health, your pride, and all the things that you hold dear on this earth, The God that stood by my Dad will stand by you.

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To Pastor - You Were An Example To Me

Where He led you - you followed,  
When He spoke - you heard His Voice.  
When He listened - you prayed.  
He was with you - you feared not.

Where He led you - you followed,  
You knew your journey was to begin tomorrow.  
You left your world to follow His Voice -  
not being forced, but by your own choice.  
You walked through stones to follow His commands –  
because so often you remembered the nail marks in His hands.  
You suffered great pain -  
you walked without an umbrella -even in the rain.

He led you to freedom - now you are ~,  
He wanted you to witness - you witnessed to me.  
He led you to a road that never seemed to end -  
but you still began to follow remembering He's your Friend.  
You followed Him through the darkness you once feared alone -  
with faith in your pocket -  
knowing you'll soon find home.

You opened your ears to hear His Voice,  
you chose to listen -  
that was freely your choice.  
You were eager to follow His commands to renew your soul,  
you let Him guide you - with his total control.  
You were faithful until the end -  
now you and Jesus are even closer friends.

*"Therefore since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens. Jesus - the Son of God  
- let us hold firmly to the faith we profess..." Hebrews 4:14.*

Heather

## GOD IS SOVEREIGN

Jewel van der Merwe

I never knew it would be so hard. There were no warnings to prepare us for the harshness and cruelty of the final days. My best friend, Travers, lying helpless in the hospital bed looking up at me with those beautiful bright blue eyes pleading and yet in vain. The medications line the dresser. The morphine doses keep increasing as the pain intensifies. The deadly cancer has found its way to the brain, so there are more medications to prevent the seizures that convulse and jerk the body unmercifully. The days drag by while the rest of the world goes their merry way. The cursers and revilers walk merrily by while my best friend, who has tried so valiantly to keep the faith and remain true to his Creator, struggles day by day.

The check-out lady in the supermarket noticed that I had bought a nutritional food supplement. She asked, "Do you have someone sick?" "Yes," I replied, "My husband is very sick." She pointed to the lady next to her and commented, "She also has someone very sick and all he will eat is the same food you are buying." I sympathetically went over to the lady at the next cash register and knew what the answer would be before I asked, "Does your husband have cancer that has spread through his body?" "Yes," she replied with tears filling her eyes. Then she took me aside and said, "How bad does it get?" With my eyes brimming with a fresh onslaught of those ever present tears, I answered, "It is worse than you could ever imagine."

I wrote the above one day in the midst of the darkest days of my life. Yes, those days were very long and very dark. On Thanksgiving (1994) my husband started having seizures. He was then in the hospital for several days having radiation for the cancer which had spread, not only to his knee, but his brain. Most of the time was spent at the hospital right up to Christmas. We brought him home December 23 where he stayed until his homegoing March 1, 1995. One night during the second week in January he suffered a series of five seizures. After that episode, it was felt by the visiting nurse that he most likely also suffered a stroke. The right side of his face was pulled to one side. He lost control of his right arm and leg. No longer could he even speak and his eyes did not focus directly on us when we entered his room. We were told that from this condition he would steadily start sleeping more and eventually go into a coma. This was a very difficult time. He was there, but he wasn't. He required constant care, but could not let us know his needs.

He did start to sleep more and a visiting nurse told us to expect him to live about 7 - 10 days. Imagine our surprise two days later when he awoke talking! The next several days were a balm to our souls. He told us that God was working in his situation and that it was all in God's control. He also told us that prophecy is now being fulfilled. When we would press him for details, he would say, "I can't tell you that" It was so wonderful to hear him say over and over, "The just will live by faith."

One day he softly said to me, "I can't bear the pain anymore." His pain to the largest extent was in the bone. Bone pain is the hardest to try and manage. It is just about impossible - as we learned. A dear friend sent us "daily manna" from the Word of God via our fax faithfully. Two days before he passed away, a fax arrived at our home with these prophetic words:

*"For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished [my] course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge,*

*shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.” II Tim. 4:6-8*

Travers found great comfort in these words. Slowly his breathing became more labored and as the end approached, my son Derek and I sat by his side. His head had been to one side for two days. When we would try to move it, he would wince with pain. We heard his breathing become slower and slower and finally stopped without him opening his eyes. We both looked at him and suddenly he turned his head and looked at us. Then the most amazing thing happened. His eyes lit up as they lifted over our heads to "something" only he could see up in the corner of the room. He took a deep breath, closed his eyes and peacefully turned his head back to the position on the side. Derek and I both looked up, waved and said, "bye Dad" together. The glory of God filled the room and we praised God and rejoiced that he had entered the corridors of light where there is no more pain to the Saviour he had been longing to see.

*What a wonder to serve such a wonderful Saviour! 'Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, thy rod and thy staff: they comfort me. "*

This is the reality of our walk with God! Knowing that He is with us in the hard times as well as in the every day business of our lives. One of the days I was sitting by my husband while he was asleep, I flipped on the television to a "televangelist". Speaking to thousands of people on national television he blasted, "If you are full of the Holy Ghost you can say to the demon cancer, 'be gone' and he has to go."

The words seemed so trite to our situation. Here lay my husband who for 4 1/2 years had held on the promises of God for healing. He had lived in the Word night and day. He had fasted many days in tears: before God. Yet, as soon as he could speak he didn't say, "Why me, Lord", but he said with full assurance, "God is working in this situation. God is in control". Yes, the words of the evangelist might appease the masses, but they are not the words for those who are in the midst of life's trials. The Word of God for those going through these realities ring loud and clear. *"When He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold"*. We believe that God heals in the midst of life's storms, we are secure, sheltered in the haven of rest.

The baptism of suffering is not very popular on the circuit today. Yet in the Word of God we can not escape that truth. Jesus said that unless we are baptised with the baptism with which He was baptised, we are not worthy to become His disciple. God's ways are so above our ways. So many times my husband would declare, "God is Sovereign". We believe that and that truth keeps our faith intact.

My husband's prayer was that he would remain faithful to the end. There is no greater reward than to hear, *"Well done, my good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of the Lord "*

A memorial fund has been set up for my husband at the Blessed Hope Community Church which he pastored in Fostoria, Michigan. They will be building their church in the spring. Contributions to the fund can be sent directly to:

Blessed Hope Community Church  
PO Box 164  
Fostoria, MI 48435

The following is continued from the January/February 1995 issue.

## SPIRITUAL DECEPTION

Travers van der Merwe

### Experience Punctuates Wisdom

The Holy Spirit inspired Scriptures are man's sole record and source of knowledge of the only true and sovereign God. The Scriptures are, in a unique and distinct sense, the Word of God. They are our wisdom, whereas Satan's source of wisdom can be traced to the *"tree of knowledge of good and evil"*, which fruit is *good for food*, *"pleasant to the eyes"*, and *"a tree to be desired to make one wise"*. All of the humanistic philosophies and godless sciences had their origin in the Garden of Eden. The Word of God was perverted back then and marked the beginning of the "New Age" religion. At the time Babel (or, Babylon) was built by Nimrod (Genesis 10:1-9), it was already officially established as a religious system, claiming to possess the highest wisdom and most divine secrets. Since that time it has manifested itself in an insubstantial religious system that is rapidly evolving with the passing years into a super structure with a broad and strong influence throughout the world. Just as faith in God's Word is the means of being born again into the Kingdom of God, so an experience of Satan's mystic wisdom is a means of being unwittingly caught in his finely meshed network. It is like a spider's web - once you are caught in it you are its captive unless you repent and, by faith, renounce it.

The whole Edenic experience in Genesis 3: 1-7 implies: conspiracy, intrigue, temptation, mysticism, pleasure, sensuality, deception, rebellion and knowledge - all of which are facets of the New Age religious system.

In the Garden of Eden, the master-minded conspiracy of Satan was subtly orchestrated. Eve's mind was the frontier he initially sought to penetrate. He appealed to her intellectual faculty, *"Yea, hath God said, ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? ". For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. "* In support of his appeal, he assured her a divine experience, *"Ye shall not surely die, ..your eyes shall be opened; and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. "*

The result of that experience proved that the wisdom Satan promised Eve was nothing but a fatal deception, for Adam said, *"The serpent beguiled me and I did eat."* It further reveals that Satan's religious proposition to Eve, *"ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil. ..* was not only a perversion of God's Word, but, was a master trick to seduce her into having a sensual experience - the inception of the history of human perversion.

Satan is a master at perversion. He always uses sophistry (subtle arguments or reasoning) as his initial technique. His next phase then is aimed at a self-centered experience on the pretext that it will make one wise, He knows only too well that a self-centered experience is short lived. However, it is his divisive way of stealthily inching his way into the life of a Christian.

This was the same strategy Satan used on Jesus Christ when he tempted him in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11). By the power of persuasion he contrived to give Jesus a self-centered experience in exchange for his obedience to the Word of God. But Jesus responded with a qualified rebuttal, "*It is written*".

A diabolic self-centered experience is always readily identified by its euphoric mystic nature and by its relation to knowledge beyond the revelation of the written Word of God. An example of this is in a letter from a family member. This family member is intelligent, well read and fairly well versed in scripture. He writes: "...I am a Pentecostal to the marrow. I have reached a spiritual depth past the scriptures and past the altar of repentance...I am now a member of the 'Order of Melchizedek'".

This was precisely the philosophical and mystical religious concept of the gnostics, propagated in John the Revelators' day. It was called "the doctrines of the depths of God. .. while in fact it was the doctrine of the depths of Satan (Revelation 2:24).

The problem with a religious self-centered experience is that it is no sooner sensed or felt than a sense of mysticism is aroused making its victim susceptible to doctrines of devils which purport to give a godly experience in depth.

### **Experience vs. Faith**

*"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 pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof; from such turn away." II Timothy 3:1-5*

This prophecy refers to the nature of the great apostasy that will befall the Church in the last days before the second advent of Jesus Christ. Essentially, this apostasy will manifest itself within the Church by three depraved characteristics: Selfishness i.e. godlessness, sensualism i.e. immorality and rebelliousness i.e. lawlessness.

Current revelations of immorality, hypocrisy, deception and corruption in the Church project a despicable image. The frightening aspect is that it is accelerating rather than abating. This abominable situation should evoke the question, "What is the cause of this depravity and who is responsible?" These are legitimate questions that demand answers. An immediate answer is the obvious one; Satan is responsible for he is the author and architect of these perversions. The present corruption is the consummation of Satan's age old intrigue to corrupt the people of God. Another aspect is found in the fact that sincere Christian leaders are unwittingly participating in Satan's elaborate program by their, "*giving heed to seducing spirits*", and "*doctrines of devils*". Without being conscious of it, they are inadvertently serving as oracles

of Satan. These pernicious doctrines stimulate emotions, imaginations and incite perverse experiences. This is how Satan gains entry and control of the lives of unstable Christians.

*“But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of.”* II Peter 2:1.2

Ever since the fall of man in the garden of Eden, the human race has engaged itself in endless scientific and philosophical experiments in its pursuit to find solutions and answers to the insurmountable problems inherent in the life stream of the human race. To this end they have diligently sought the answers in religious experiences.

"What we have now to ask is 'why do men deliberately seek for religious experiences?' The answer is two-fold; it is because of something in the nature of religion. Man is a creature who realizes to some degree the limitations of his own nature. He can never get rid of his mind, neither can he get rid of his body so long as he lives. Yet all the time he is wanting either to be rid of his body and become a 'pure spirit or else to be relieved of the embarrassment of a critical intelligence. Man pictured as Adam, a creature expelled from Paradise, is symbolically a 'true' picture. Man feels that he is a 'displaced person', restless, disappointed, without a home, always craving to return to some state of existence where he can be released from himself and the warring element of his nature. This consciousness of an inner division and of a persistent but unspecified hunger is one of the chief characteristics which distinguish man as a 'religious' creature from the rest of the animal kingdom. Man always seems to have been aware of this interior disharmony, of a personal incompleteness which cannot be resolved by any of the normal psycho-physical activities of daily life. Always, even in religions like Buddhism, man seeks union with some Being or Power in contact with whom the disharmony of mind-and-body, matter-and-spirit, self-and-non-self, can be brought into a splendidly satisfying concordance. This yearning, which Professor Murphy calls 'man's essential quest, is the motivation behind all those techniques which are designed to create the conditions suitable for such religious experiences.'"<sup>1</sup>

### **Damnable Heresies - A Religious Experiment**

Heresy defined is "Doctrine departures from revealed truth or erroneous views".<sup>2</sup>

The Judaistic Heresy in Paul's day held circumcision and the whole moral law and ceremonial law of Moses to be still binding and the observance of them necessary to salvation. It was this heresy against which the Pauline Epistles grappled and struggled. Paul's contention was that the practice or exercise of any religious experiment could not earn the salvation of Jesus Christ, which alone comes by faith in God's Word and without works. *"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast."* Ephesians 2:8, 9.

In the infant development of the early Church there were certain fundamental forms of heresy which reappeared with modification in almost every subsequent period. In contemporary times we are experiencing a renaissance of some of the old heresies. These heresies, dressed in

beautiful Christian garb acclaimed by the world, are assuming an enchanting "Charismatic" look. Heresies always cater and appeal to man's emotion, ego and intellect. They will always put man on an experiential course, ostensibly destined to give man the ultimate "experience".

The feature that makes heresy so attractive to most Christians is its subtle appeal to give its recipient a new experience, a new anointing, a new illumination, a new love, new knowledge, a new revival, a new faith, new baptism, new healing, new prosperity, a new relationship, a new move, a new wave, a new joy and lastly a new "ego" trip. These are popular themes often preached by popular evangelists.

### **Contemporary New Age/Theosophy Heresy** **The Great Perverse Experiment**

The New Age philosophy is a vast subject. It is gaining more popularity than any other religion in the world. Books written on the subject inundate the commercial industry. America's greatest scientific experiment today is with New Age philosophy.

It is imperative therefore for every professing believer to readily identify New Age philosophy as distinct from the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is not necessary to research the subject in depth; however, it is highly recommended that at least a basic knowledge of its philosophy be acquired.

The precursors of New Age heresy are: Cabalism, Gnosticism and Neo-Platonism. All these contain the same basic elements and in essence are birds of the same feather. Experiential religion is their common denominator as well as the cornerstone of their religious systems. It is also their main ingredient to ultimate reality. They all reject the Holy Scriptures as the only authority on salvation. Their gospel is an experiential gospel as opposed to the gospel of faith and grace.

Since we are dealing with the cults with reference to spiritual experiences as it pertains to the Church today, it would be appropriate to briefly define New Age heresy in the context of its prime elements. The following is the basic combination of philosophical elements that constitute the New Age.

Mysticism. Mysticism is the watermark of all cults. Mysticism as defined by the cults: "The act of seeking union with the godhead. It has been defined by Thomas Aquino as, 'the knowledge of god through experience' and by Evelyn Underhill as, 'The art of union with reality.'"<sup>3</sup>

Gnosticism. "Gnosticism, an esoteric religious movement that flourished during the second and third century AD. and presented a major challenge to orthodox Christianity. Most Gnostic sects professed Christianity but their beliefs sharply diverged from those of Christianity in the early Church. To its adherents, Gnosticism promised a secret knowledge of the divine realm. Sparks or seeds of the Divine Being fell from this transcendent realm into the material universe, which is wholly evil, and were imprisoned in human bodies. Re-awakened by knowledge, the divine element in humanity can return to its proper home in the transcendental spiritual realm." The definition of Gnosticism is "a system of religion mixed with Greek and Oriental philosophy (1st-6th century AD.), intermediate between Christianity and paganism, which taught that knowledge, rather than faith, was the greatest good, and that through

knowledge alone could salvation be attained.”<sup>5</sup> Basically what is being said here implies that man's redemption and justification is not by faith in God according to the scriptures, but rather in "mystical knowledge" acquired by a personal experience. This is the theme that is intrinsically intertwined in all the doctrines of the cults and occults.

Neo-Platonism “Neo-Platonism - metaphysical with theological emphasis tending toward mysticism. The individual souls only escape from the material world is by purificatory stages, which start with practice of virtues and lead through mystical ecstasies until reabsorption with God is reached.”<sup>6</sup>

Cabalism "Cabala (Hebrew, 'received tradition') generally Jewish mysticism in all its forms; specifically the esoteric theosophy that crystallized in the 13th Century...and generated all later mystical movements in Judaism.

The origins of Cabala date back to antiquity. From the 12th century Jewish mystics have used the term to denote this continuity of thought from the beginnings of Judaism. Jewish history reveals that from early times there was a trend in Judaism toward speculation about the mysteries of God and the universe. In the days when the Talmud was being compiled (edited 500 AD.) there were warnings against the tendency to delve into uncontrolled speculation that might lead to a misinterpretation of true religious knowledge and understanding.

Cabala-Jewish mysticism is an attempt, in spite of man's limited knowledge, to peer beyond the seen, the touched and the heard. All peoples have such cravings and seek to penetrate the mysteries of heaven and earth. The Jewish mystics wanted to understand the nature of God and how man relates to the deity. As a result of their meditation and inner groping, they sought answers to questions that to this day perplex the world.

Cabala was a divergence from the formalistic, legalistic modes of religion and thought. It was concluded that there are esoteric and mystical values in the Bible, in Jewish law, and in Jewish religious practice that they must seek out. Cabala tried to establish the thesis that reason alone cannot give us all the answers to questions about God and physical existence. It points to the role of emotion and poetry in any understanding of religion. Through some of its symbolism and imagery it intensified faith and gave those Jews who subscribed to its ideas a sense of the divine, and a feeling of purpose." <sup>7</sup>

Theosophy is a synthesis of religion, philosophy, and science. It is an attempt to bring together for mutual enrichment the best thinking of the Eastern and Western worlds.

The name 'theosophy' was first used in Alexandria in the 3rd century AD., in connection with the teachings of the Greek mysteries concerning God. Based on its Greek derivation, the word refers to the divine wisdom as it unfolds in the human spirit, not a set of beliefs superimposed upon man. This Wisdom is considered to underlie the teachings of all religions. The concepts of Theosophy have appeared in the philosophical systems of China, India, and Egypt, and in the works of the Gnostics, Neoplatonists, and Cabalists, or medieval Jewish mystics.

Theosophy denies that the human spirit can ultimately be lost, because it is intrinsically eternal and indestructible. Through successive reembodyments in physical form, with accompanying

emotional, mental, and psychic responses to experience, the spirit attains mastery over its vehicles and man reaches the expression of his godhood.

Three goals of Theosophy:

1. Form a Universal brotherhood of humanity without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste, color.
2. Encourage study of comparative religion, philosophy, and science.
3. To investigate unexplained laws of nature and the powers latent in man. Complete freedom of individual search and belief. 8

New Age heresy and its experiential religion is deeply entrenched in Christian theology. It continues to corrupt the absolute concepts of the Christian faith. It undermines faith in the Word of God and it changes the literal interpretation of the Bible to virtually a symbolic script. Thus, allowing its devotees to interpret the Bible however they chose.

“The glue binding most New Age devotees is one of common mystical experiences. 'Experiential religion' is considered vital within the movement. A substantial proportion of those within the movement strongly believe in psychic phenomena and say they do so because of direct experiences.

Those among their number who have not participated in the communal trippings of the 'light Fantastic' are encouraged to try meditation, LSD, or anyone of the scores of 'Psychotechnologies' promised to induce 'transformation' - a euphemism for progressively deeper levels of demonic influence. 9

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1 G. Stephens Spinks: "Psychology and Religion - An Introduction to Contemporary Views" (1963) p. 152-153.

2 Ungers Bible Dictionary, Moody Press, p. 468

3 Dictionary of Mysticism and Occults, Harper and Row.

4 Gnosticism, Funk Wagnalls New Encyclopedia, Volume 12 p.10

5 Websters International Dictionary and Encyclopedia

6 The Encyclopedia Americana, International Edition, 1987, Grolier Inc. Vol. 20.

7 Ibid. Vol. 26

8 Ibid.

9 The Hidden Dangers of the Rainbow by Constance Cumbey, Huntington House, 1982, p. 54

**-To be continued -**

## *Church in Asia Minor*

### Committee on Missions

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Paul the Apostle  
c/o Aquila the Tentmaker  
Corinth, Greece

Dear Paul,

We recently received a copy of your letter to the Galatians. The committee has directed me to inform you of a number of things which deeply concern us.

First, we find your language to be somewhat intemperate. In your letter, after a brief greeting to the Galatians, you immediately attack your opponents by claiming they "want to pervert the gospel of Christ." You then say that such men should be regarded as "accursed"; and, in another place, you make reference to "false brethren." Wouldn't it be more charitable to give them the benefit of the doubt -- at least until the General Assembly has investigated and adjudicated the matter? To make the situation worse, you later say, "I could wish those who trouble you would even cut themselves off!" Is such a statement really fitting for a Christian minister? The remark seems quite harsh and unloving.

Paul, we really feel the need to caution you about the tone of your epistles. You come across in an abrasive manner to many people. In some of your letters you've even mentioned names; and this practice has, no doubt, upset the friends of Hymenaeus, Alexander, and others. After all, many persons were first introduced to the Christian faith under the ministries of these men. Although some of our missionaries have manifested regrettable shortcomings, nevertheless, it can only stir up bad feelings when you speak of these men in a derogatory manner.

In other words, Paul, I believe you should strive for a more moderate posture in your ministry. Shouldn't you try to win those who are in error by displaying a sweeter spirit? By now, you've probably alienated the Judaizers to the point that they will no longer listen to you.

By your outspokenness, you have also diminished your opportunities for future influences throughout the church as a whole. Rather, if you had worked more quietly, you might have been asked to serve on a presbytery committee appointed to study the issue. You could then have contributed your insights by helping to draft a good committee paper on the theological position of the Judaizers, without having to drag personalities into the dispute.

Besides, Paul, we need to maintain unity among those who profess a belief in Christ. The Judaizers at least stand with us as we confront the surrounding paganism and humanism which prevail within the culture of the contemporary Roman Empire. The Judaizers are our allies in our struggles against abortion, homosexuality, government tyranny, etc. We cannot afford to allow differences over doctrinal minutiae to obscure this important fact.

I also must mention that questions have been raised about the contents of your letter, as well as your style. The committee questions the propriety of the doctrinaire structure of your letter. Is it wise to plague young Christians, like the Galatians, with such heavy theological issues? For example, in a couple of places, you allude to the doctrine of election; you also enter into a

lengthy discussion of the law. Perhaps you could have proved your case in some other ways, without mentioning these complex and controverted points of Christianity. Your letter is so doctrinaire, it will probably serve only to polarize the differing factions within the churches. Again, we need to stress unity, instead of broaching issues which will accent divisions among us.

In one place, you wrote, "Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing." Paul, you have a tendency to describe things strictly in black and white terms, as if there are no gray areas. You need to temper your expressions, lest you become too exclusive. Otherwise, your outlook will drive away many people, and make visitors feel unwelcome. Church growth is not promoted by taking such a hard line and remaining inflexible.

Remember Paul, there is no such thing as a perfect church. We have to tolerate many imperfections in the church, since we cannot expect to have everything at once. If you will simply think back over your own experience, you will recall how you formerly harassed the church in your times of ignorance. By reflecting on you own past, you might acquire a more sympathetic attitude toward the Judaizers. Be patient, and give them some time to come around to a better understanding. In the meantime, rejoice that we all share a common profession of faith in Christ, since we have all been baptised in his name.

Sincerely,

Charles Phinney  
Coordinator, Committee on Missions

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