

StraitWay



January 2000

Thoughts For The New Year

When the old year ends and the new begins, thoughts often turn to the evaluation of the past and plans for the future. Why can some yesterdays be recalled with great pleasure? Usually it is because something good happened: (1) A soul converted, (2) someone agreed to study, (3) truth was upheld, (4) a congregational problem solved, (5) error renounced. Whatever the good, did it just happen or did someone plan and work the plan? Paul made plans (Rom. 15:28). If we have no plans or purposes in life, we wander with aimless feet. Consider some thoughts for this year.

I will read God's Word every day. "The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple" (Ps. 119:130). "Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way" (Ps. 119:104). We need to have God's word fresh in our mind. Then we can give an answer for our hope (I Pet. 3:15).

I will pray to God every day. "Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice" (Ps. 55:17). "But unto thee have I cried, O Lord; and in the morning shall my prayer prevent thee" (Ps. 88:13). "Pray without ceasing" (I Th. 5:17). Many people want, and need, our prayers. Our own work should prompt constant prayer. We need to come boldly to the throne of grace to let our requests be made known to Him who sees in secret. Paul wrote, "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God" (Phil. 4:6).

I will not be ashamed of the gospel. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16). Are we reluctant, or ashamed, to talk about the gospel in a public place? How often has someone asked us a question and we answer with timidity when there are those around us who need the truth.

I will put on the whole armour of God and stand for the truth. "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil...and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth...For we wrestle...against spiritual wickedness..." (Eph. 6:11-14,12). It takes time to equip ourselves "...to give an answer to every man that asketh...a reason..." of our hope (I Pet. 3:15). In addition, it takes time to learn how to deal with doctrinal errors. We are warned to "Beware of false prophets..." and "...try the spirits..." (I John 4:1). This type of growth comes from dealing with those errors rather than closing our eyes and pretending they do not exist. Errors relating to the Deity of Christ, AD 70, MDR, Romans 14, fellowship, mechanical instruments of music in worship, the uniqueness of the church of Christ, and doctrinal softness in the pulpit.

I will be alert to the approaching apostasy among "conservative churches." Some may deny there is an approaching apostasy. If one has his eyes open to what is happening among us, what else can he conclude? Study Carefully.

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The Evangelist and His Work Some Introductory Matters

Understanding Bible terms is essential to understanding the message of divine revelation, because one's practice can be no better than one's grasp of the Lord's will relative to any matter (Eph. 5:17). Such an understanding will help to correct any discrepancy in practice. An evangelist is one who bears the gospel message, whether to the lost or to the saved. The gospel is the glad tidings of the kingdom of God, of salvation that is in Christ, and of what relates to that salvation, according to Thayer and other lexicographers.

The Scope of Gospel Preaching

The point is made by some that there is a sharp distinction between the gospel and the doctrine. They insist that the gospel includes what one must know and do to become a Christian, while the doctrine involves what the saint must know and do to serve God as his child. The distinction is further carried out as they maintain that we can only teach the doctrine to the church and that we preach the gospel to aliens (non-Christians). Is the distinction really correct? Does it bear the scrutiny of a close examination of the New Testament? It is this writer's strong conviction that such distinction is unscriptural, being in the same category as that which says there is a difference between the Moral Law and the Ceremonial Law of the Old Testament. Both of them were hatched in fertile minds seeking some way to prop up ideas and notions which their proponents were determined to hold to.

This distinction is not a Biblical. These passages prove that doctrine can be taught to aliens: Acts 5:28, (Jerusalem was filled with the apostles' doctrine of Christ); Acts 13:12, (Paul preached doctrine to the alien Sergius Paulus); Acts 17:18,19 (Paul spoke doctrine when he preached Jesus); Rom. 6:17, (Paul said that the Roman saints, while aliens, obeyed the form of doctrine delivered them). It can also be demonstrated that purity of doctrine is essential, in contrast to the loose view that there can be much latitude in doctrine. In Romans 16:17, 18 the apostle taught God's people to mark and turn away from those teaching contrary to the doctrine. John said that those remaining in the doctrine of Christ have both the Father and the Son, while any going onward and failing to abide in it do not have them. Paul instructed Timothy to teach certain ones to teach no other doctrine (I Tim. 1:3). The doctrines of the Nicolaitans and of Balaam were strongly denounced in Revelation 2:14, 15 and 24.

The same misuse and misrepresentation shown in regard to doctrine will now be proved in regard to gospel preaching. Study the passages that follow: Acts 20:25, in which Paul said he preached the kingdom to the church at Ephesus; Rom. 1:15, which shows Paul ready to preach the gospel to the saints at Rome; and Rom. 16:25, where Paul said saints can be established by the gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ. In each passage gospel preaching, which some maintain cannot be done to saints, is seen as directed toward saints. The distinction already referred to, then, appears human, arbitrary, and unscriptural. It can also be learned from Gal. 1:6-8 and 2: 12-14 that perversion of the gospel can take place when teaching detrimental to that system of doctrine revealed in Jesus Christ is done. Indeed, the false teaching considered in the Galatian letter did not relate directly to what is usually associated with the gospel (Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection). In fact, the conduct of Peter when he acted the hypocrite is what Paul described as not walking uprightly according to the truth of the gospel. Evidently no teaching was referred to in this instance, only his conduct; yet his conduct was not according to the gospel. How could this be if the gospel relates only to the non-Christian? It could not be!

While it is admitted that in certain passages different aspects of the message might be emphasized, it is altogether inaccurate to try to maintain the distinctions here discussed. Gospel preachers, evangelists, proclaim the gospel to both the church and the world.

"A. D. 70" Doctrine What Is It All About?

One of the reasons that false doctrine exists is to provide comfort for those living in sin. Whenever I hear of brethren casting aside truth for error, the question always arises as to why? What is it that this particular doctrine offers that truth does not? I'll say in the outset of this study that the logical end of this "A.D. 70" doctrine, is simply rank calvinism. No doubt most involved in this heresy will deny this emphatically. In the next several months I intend to show this fact and many other consequences of this doctrine which are equally dangerous.

Eschatology is the study of last things or end time events. Realized Eschatology expounds the concept that all of these end time events have already taken place. Max King and others in his camp believe that the fall of Jerusalem is the event in which ALL end time things were fulfilled or completed. Here is an overview of their doctrine.

At the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70:

The Kingdom of Christ was fully established - { and NOT at Pentecost }
The New Covenant was fully established - { and NOT at Pentecost }
The Second Coming of Christ , the Resurrection, and The Judgment Day Occurred
The Saints Received their Eternal Inheritance and All Prophecy was fulfilled
The Lord's Supper changed in meaning or ceased to be required of saints at all!
The Gospel Plan of Salvation, given on Pentecost, was 'Consummated' {or began in 70}

This doctrine is a quagmire of 'hidden spiritual meanings' and tortured word definitions to suit their purpose. Brother Gene Frost wrote in his fine work on Pentecostalism about this type of reasoning. " Plain passages are passed off, ignored, in favor of this feeling of superior understanding that surpasses and even contradicts the plain and obvious import of language." { on cabalism; pg.29, Gene Frost, The 'Oneness' Doctrine of Pentecostalism }.

It is my belief that the Holy Spirit revealed God's word in such a way that common people with common sense could with sincere study learn what was needed for the salvation of their souls. This doctrine seems to takes the opposite tack. This doctrine is in the process of 'bottoming out'. Some proponents cannot see the calvinistic consequences ,while others readily accept them.

This is NOT an issue of whether that the destruction of Jerusalem was foretold in the scriptures. { for ex.; Dan. 9:27, Matt. 24: 1-34 }

This is NOT an issue of whether that the judgment of Jerusalem was a 'coming of Christ' in some sense. { Matt. 24: 30 }

Next month, we will see how that the "A.D.70" doctrine stacks up against plain bible truth on the subject of the Establishment of the Kingdom of Christ. Study your Bibles!

Institutionalism

Introduction

"When that generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation arose after them who did not know the LORD nor the work which He had done for Israel. Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served the Baals; and they forsook the LORD God of their fathers..." (Judges 2:10-12a). From this passage we can learn that it takes ONLY ONE GENERATION of failing to teach the ways of God, to produce a generation headed for apostacy. An untaught generation will have more in common with the world than with God. Because they lack proper appreciation for the ways of God they find it easier to reach accommodation with the people around them, adopting their ways, and forsaking the ways of God.

With the above thoughts in mind I accepted bro. Glenn Melton's request that I write this series of articles on INSTITUTIONALISM. It certainly is not a DEAD ISSUE today. It may be true that many have already heard and read the things I will be writing about, but we must never forget that a new generation is here, many of whom were not old enough to remember the battles fought during the last 5 decades over Institutionalism. And, they certainly need to know what the truth is, or they will soon forsake the "God of their fathers" and drift into apostacy. If we don't tell them, who will?

Many today do not know why Institutionalism is wrong. This series of articles is intended to point out why it is wrong. It can help some who are misinformed and ignorant, if they want to see. It may help some who do know, but do not know how to state the reasons clearly, or do not understand what the real issues are. It is my intention to write clearly enough to be easily understood.

I remember, as a boy-preacher in the early 1950's, that I was completely ignorant of the reasons for the division that was then occurring in the Lord's church in various places. I had no understanding of what was wrong with such things as the "Herald of Truth" and "Orphan Homes", and in fact, at first embraced them, since they were being promoted in the name of "the Church of Christ." Even though I had been taught that no organization larger than, smaller than, or other than, the local church, had a scriptural right to exist. I didn't connect that with these human institutions, for, after all, they were being promoted by brethren I trusted. But, there was one other principle that had been drilled into my mind through the years. Every religious belief and practice must be established on the basis of God's word. Without book, chapter and verse, nothing should be believed or practiced. So, upon a closer examination, and after much study, I finally realized why they were wrong. They violated God's divine pattern of doing things. (Phil.4:9). They existed without scriptural authority, thus without God's approval. (Col.3:17). Finally, in 1960, I began preaching against such organizations. Sadly, many of my generation (some untaught, some misinformed, some prejudiced) went along with them, including my family. Even the preacher, and the church where I grew up, and most of the churches where I first learned to preach, were carried away by institutional-minded preachers more concerned with being accepted by the denominations and the world, than following divine wisdom. "Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ." (Colossians.2:8).

As you read these articles during the next few months, please keep in mind that I make no claim for originality in the material presented, even though the arrangement may be mine. The knowledge gleaned through the years from those with whom I have studied, read after, and/or listened to, has been blended with my own thoughts. So, I readily admit lack of originality. But, I believe them to be true and accept responsibility for the things written. Future articles will define INSTITUTIONALISM, showing from the scriptures why it is wrong, and note some of the attitudes and actions that contribute to the advance of Institutionalism among brethren. Some of the past history of the Restoration Movement will be noted, showing the present digression is not new, but was also prevalent in the Restoration Movement.

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Popular Doctrines - "Total Hereditary Depravity"

The doctrine of Total Hereditary Depravity (inherited sin) is nothing new. The denominational world has been teaching that man is born a sinner for years. This teaching simply states that because Adam sinned, all men are born with a "sinful nature." With such, we are born sinners, and there is nothing we can do about it. Nor can we do anything "good" by ourselves. Does the Bible teach such a doctrine?

1. The Fall Of Adam: When talking about "inherited" sin, it is only logical to look to the first man as the one who placed sin upon all mankind. In Genesis 2, God created man and gave him something to do (Gen. 2:7, 15-17). At this time, God and man had such a close relationship that God walked in the garden in the cool of the day with Adam (Gen. 3:8). In Genesis 3:1-6, man yielded to temptation and sinned. Because Adam and Eve sinned, they suffered several physical consequences, and spiritually died that day (v. 23-24). Up to this point, both those in the Lord's church and the Calvinists would agree.

Now, what happened to Adam's children? Were they born in sin? God told Cain that if he would do well, he would be accepted, but if not, "*sin lieth at the door*" (Gen. 4:7). This differs greatly from Calvinism. According to Calvinism, sin did not "lie at the door" for Cain, it was already deeply rooted within him thanks to Adam's sin. The Bible says Enoch, "*the seventh from Adam*", "*walked with God*" (Gen. 5:21-24). To the Calvinist we ask, how can one "*walk with God*" being born in sin? God cannot fellowship those in sin (Isa. 59:1-2; I Jn. 1:5). We could pose the same question for Noah who also "*walked with God*" (Gen. 6:9). The only logical conclusion is that we cannot inherit sin. Each one is responsible for his own sin, just as God says (Ezek. 18:1-3, 20; Col. 3:25).

2. The "Proof-Texts" Of Inherited Sin: Knowing that so many believe in "inherited" sin, let us study the passages the Calvinists use to support their claim that we have inherited sin from Adam. One such passage is Psalm 51:5: "*Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.*" However, Psalm 51:1-4 sheds greater light on this subject. "*Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: ... blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only, have I sinned,....*" David wrote this psalm after Nathan had confronted him (II Sam. 12:1-7). Psalm 51:5 is not an account of David being an illegitimate son, for he was Jesse's eighth son (I Sam. 16:10-11). He was not confessing something over which he had no control like "inherited" sins. He is confessing that he has been a sinner from an early age. Thus, he asks God to forgive his sins and his sins alone!

Read Psalm 51:7, 9-12 and notice the personal pronouns "me," "my," and "I." Why was David not praying about Adam's or his children's sin? It is because he knew that his sin was not inherited, nor would he "pass" the guilt of his sins on to others! He would answer for his own sins, and no one else's!

Another passage used by the Calvinists is Romans 5:12. *Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.*" The people did this to themselves. For it to teach what the Calvinists want, this passage should read, "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, by Adam's sin."

3. Other Passages Refuting Inherited Sin: Isaiah taught that the sins that separated between man and God were individual in nature (Isa. 59:1-2). James taught that man was made in the likeness of God (Jas. 3:9). Is God inherently sinful? Answer that question, and the controversy is over!

Man cannot inherit sin (Ezek. 18:4, 20). The reason God had to tell the Jews here that sin was not inherited was because they didn't listen to Him in Deuteronomy 24:16! God said, "*As I live, saith the Lord GOD, ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel*" (Ezek. 18:2-3). In like manner, there is no reason for us to use this proverb in the USA! The Bible says, "*He that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done...*" (Col. 3:25). Total Hereditary Depravity is something that has come from the mind of men, and not the mind of God. Let us not be fooled.

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Conversion: Introduction & Principles

The most important thing that could possibly preoccupy us on this earth is the quest for salvation. The attitude of those penitent sinners in Jerusalem was appropriate. "*Men and brethren, what shall we do?*" they asked. (Acts 2:37) There is no greater question than that. You may amount to many things in this life. But if you have not equipped your soul to meet the judgment day, your life has been a total, miserable failure. In the next several issues of *StraitWay*, therefore, I intend to discuss the Biblical concept of conversion.

Conversion means that a change takes place in a person's life. The word, conversion, simply means "a changing or turning". To *convert* something is to change it or make it become something else. If you drive a *convert*-ible, you drive a car that can change. It can take on a different form before your very eyes. Likewise, when a person is spiritually converted, they are changed. They experience some changes in their life. The person seeking Christ experiences a change in their *intellect*, in their *will*, in their *allegiance*, and ultimately in their *relationship with God*. Each of these will be discussed individually in future articles of this series.

Conversion involves the forgiveness of a person's sins. Acts 3 records the preaching of Peter and John to those who were lost (needing conversion). As they stood on a certain porch of the temple, Peter said, "*Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out.*" (v.19) From this we easily learn that the "blotting out" of a person's sins occurs upon their conversion. The two concepts are inseparable. If a person desires that their sins be forgiven, they must experience a conversion or change in their life. Sins separate us from God. (Isa.59:1-2) Conversion leads to the removal of those sins.

Jesus Christ is the means by which a person is converted. We have just noticed that conversion brings about the blotting out, or forgiveness, of sins. This process, then, must involve the Son of God. He was called "Jesus" because He would save His people from their sins. (Matt.1:21) Paul proved that all are under condemnation for their sins. (Rom.3:9,23) But through faith in Jesus, folks today can have the same standing before God as did Abraham because of his faith. (Rom.4) Sinful mankind can have access by faith into the grace of God. (Rom.5:1-2) Jesus Himself plainly said, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.*" (Jn.14:6) So conversion is related to the forgiveness of a person's sins but this can only occur through Jesus Christ.

Conversion cannot take place without a person's obedience. The spiritual conversion of a person is a process that must be made *practical*. That is, it must at some point become something to which a person can relate and in which a person can participate. For me to tell you that Jesus Christ is the means by which a person's sins are forgiven is great but I must also tell you how this forgiveness takes place through Jesus Christ. Remember the question of those during the Pentecost? "*Men and brethren, what shall we do?*" (Acts 2:38) They understood that Jesus Christ was the means of forgiveness, but wanted to know how they could be recipients of such a blessing. It is not enough to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. It is not enough to pray Him into your heart. (That's not how He gets in there anyway.) It's not enough to recognize Him as a tremendous historical figure who lived a sinless life, died a cruel death, and was resurrected. These things must be made practical in the lives of men and women seeking to be converted. It is the one who *obeys* God who receives the blessings of Jesus Christ into his life. Jesus, we're told, is the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him. (Heb.5:9) Conversion, then, involves the forgiveness of sins through God's mercy, Jesus' blood, and our obedience.

In the next few articles, we'll address this obedience required of man. We will seek to answer the question, "*...what shall we do?*"

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A Falling Away

“Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition...” (II Th. 2:1-3).

“Preach the word....For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables” (II Tim. 4:2-4).

“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them” (Acts 20:28-30).

In the second century, the seeds of apostasy were sown when one elder was raised above the others and called a bishop. The fruit of this small departure is the Catholic Church. During the Restoration Movement, the seeds of apostasy were sown when the missionary society was formed in 1849. This small departure resulted in the formation of The First Christian Church. In the 1950's, a similar departure resulted in another apostasy.

Are the seeds of another apostasy being sown? Some think so. What are the evidences of it? (1) In the last sixteen years, sermon content, particularly in gospel meetings, has changed drastically. It used to be that sermons provided serious Bible study. Enlightening, thought provoking lessons were the order of the day. Truth was defended and error denounced in no uncertain terms. Thankfully, some still preach that way, but in too many places we have the “after dinner” preachers or the “feel good” preachers as some have called them. Members of the church and denominational people are able to hear many, many sermons with little fear of having their thinking disturbed, their false doctrines challenged, or their worldliness called in question. People come feeling good and leave feeling good. It is no wonder that in many places members of the church have a diminishing knowledge of the Bible and a changed concept of what is pleasing to God. (2) We are doctrinally divided. False teaching about the nature of Christ on earth; Romans 14 and fellowship with sin, even false teachers; marriage, divorce, and remarriage; the AD 70 doctrine; and the one covenant doctrine.

Only God sees the future with unerring eye. Yet, the conditions which exist among us, point to a parting of the ways. Are you going to be swept into the soft gospel and extended fellowship? Will you be deceived by the humanizing of Jesus Christ? Or, will you take your stand on the truth?

Brethren, now is the time to arm ourselves with truth. Let us determine that we will stand for that which is right and against that which is wrong. Study carefully.

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Looking Backward, Looking Forward

Paul charged Timothy to “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine...But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry’ (II Tim. 4:2-5).....” Titus was commanded to “...speak thou the things which become sound doctrine....” (Tit. 2:1). Though Timothy and Titus were young preachers, they were highly esteemed for their work, sacrifice, and patience.

Into the life of preachers come sunshine and clouds: days of rejoicing and days for tears, days when one is glad he is a preacher and others when he wonders why he ever wanted to preach. It is when one has one of those cloudy days he wishes someone knew he is out there preaching his heart out in an effort to save the lost and edify the saved. StraitWay is our way of letting young men know that older people, especially older preachers, know they are there and appreciate their work.

To add breadth to StraitWay, it was deemed wise to invite other men to help with the writing. In 1999, you read with appreciation the work of the following brethren: Randall Elrod, Norman Fultz, Ron Lloyd, Steve Walker, and Wendell Watts. I am thankful to each of them for the many hours spent in producing timely articles. May God richly bless these brethren in every righteous endeavor.

This year you will be blessed by the writing of the following brethren: Bobby L. Graham of Athens, Alabama, writing about the evangelist and his work, Jarrod Jacobs of White Bluff, Tennessee, writing about prominent religious doctrines, Jason Malham of Goodlettsville, Tennessee, writing about conversion, Thomas Thornhill, SR of Buckhorn, Mississippi, writing about institutional issues, and Dan Wilson of Athens, Texas, writing about the AD 70 doctrine.

Much gratitude is due to my good friend and brother in Christ, Jimmy Crews, for financing StraitWay and to brother Peter Scalise and his staff for printing and mailing. Brother Dan Henderson of Jasper, Texas, keeps the mailing list, prints the mailing labels, prepares StraitWay for printing, and has put StraitWay on the Henderson family internet site. Dan has done an excellent work. Thanks to each one.

If you know of someone who would benefit from StraitWay, especially young preachers, send name and address to brother Dan Henderson whose information is at the bottom of this page. -- Editor

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