

The Concordant Newsletter

NUMBER 3

JULY-SEPTEMBER 1996

EDITORIAL

EVERY BELIEVER surely has the right to his own opinion. Yet the right to one's opinion carries with it the obligation to see to it that one's opinion is right. Therefore, God's people need to learn how to *think*, both clearly and accurately, in order that they might make wise and valid judgments.

Apart from divine enlightenment, however, clear thinking and intelligence, however excellent, by themselves, will by no means suffice for discerning either the will of God or the truth of God. All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are concealed in Him (Col.2:3). We may sooner create the galaxies by ourselves than understand the Scriptures apart from God's enabling power.

Just as proficiency in any field requires training and experience, progress in the faith is impossible apart from *prayer* and *education*. This is God's *way*; it is His "means of grace." It is unrealistic and foolish to minimize the importance of either of these two entities.

In prayer, as in our walk as a whole, we are to become imitators of the apostle Paul; as he says, "according as I also am [an imitator] of Christ" (1 Cor.11:1). Thus we have the apostle "for a model" (Phil.3:17). We do well to note that his concerns and petitions to God are not for soulish welfare but for *spiritual enlightenment*. Among his most notable prayers are the following:

"Therefore, I also, on hearing of this faith of yours in the Lord Jesus, and that for all the saints, do not cease giving thanks for you, making mention in my prayers that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may be giving you a *spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the realization of Him*, the eyes of your heart having been enlightened, for you to perceive what is the expectation of His calling, and what the riches of the

glory of His allotment among the saints, and what the transcendent greatness of His power for us who are believing, in accord with the operation of the might of His strength” (Eph. 1:15-19; *cp* 2 Cor.4:13).

“Be rejoicing *in the Lord* always! Again, I will declare, be rejoicing! Let your lenience be known to all men: the Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God, and the peace of God, that is superior to every frame of mind, shall be garrisoning your hearts and your apprehensions in Christ Jesus” (Phil.4:4-7).

“We are thanking the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, always praying concerning you, on hearing of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints, because of the expectation reserved for you in the heavens, which you hear before in *the word of the truth of the evangel*, which, being present with you, according as in the entire world also, *is bearing fruit and growing*, according as it is among you also, *from the day on which you hear and realized the grace of God in truth*, according as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow slave, who is *a faithful dispenser of Christ* for us, who makes evident to us *your love in spirit*.

“Therefore we also, from the day on which we hear, *do not cease praying for you* and requesting that you may be *filled full with the realization of His will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding*, you to walk worthily of the Lord for all pleasing, bearing fruit in every good work, and growing in *the realization of God*; being endowed with all power, in accord with the might of His glory, *for all endurance and patience with joy*; at the same time *giving thanks to the Father*, Who makes you competent for a part of the allotment of the saints, in light” (Col.1:3-12).

May these prayers be our guide as we seek wisdom from above and spiritual understanding. May this be so both in our lives as a whole, as well as in our considerations of themes of consequence such as the topics presented in this issue: “The Sin Offering” (p.51); “The Equipose of Truth” (p.56); “The Myth of Free Will” (p.57); and “The Holy Spirit of God” (p.69). J.R.C.

THE SIN OFFERING

(2 Corinthians 5:20,21)

WE BELIEVE that the conciliation is “the secret of the evangel” referred to in Ephesians 6:19. It is not a second evangel, but an aspect of the death, entombment and resurrection of Christ, a gracious feature of the evangel which had been hushed up in previous times (Rom.16:25). That Christ was to be the sin offering was known before, being pictured in the Old Testament sacrifices and foretold by Isaiah (53:4-10). The benefit of justification was prefigured by Abraham (Gen.15:6) and prophesied by Habakkuk (2:4). But the further truth that God would remove the barriers of enmity between mankind and Himself because of the sacrifice of Christ was not known. That was a secret, not a secret evangel but the secret *of the evangel*.

We must never separate the secret of the evangel from the basic evangel itself. In 2 Corinthians 5:20,21 the apostle Paul joins the word of the conciliation (“We are beseeching for Christ’s sake, ‘Be conciliated to God!’”) firmly with the word of the cross (“For the One not knowing sin, He makes to be a sin offering for our sakes that we may be becoming God’s righteousness in Him”). There could be no conciliation without the sacrifice. All our blessings are based on Christ’s finished work, the shedding of His blood, and the victorious resurrection from among the dead. And the conciliation is no exception; it too is firmly founded on the gratuity of Christ in becoming the sin offering for our sakes.

EVANGELISTS AND AMBASSADORS

All ambassadors of Christ, heralding the conciliation, *must* also be evangelists because this message is so firmly based on the evangel. On the other hand we can only say for those who claim to be evangelists, that they *should* also be ambas-

sadors of peace. The sad fact is that the majority of those who are heralding Christ crucified have little to say about the benefits of the conciliation. Like Paul, we can rejoice whenever Christ is being announced (Phil.1:18), but we cannot but be disturbed when the evangel concerning Christ becomes distorted or remains incomplete. The anathema associated with such a ministry (Gal.1:8,9) is twofold: there is a present despoiling and lack of spiritual progress and growth for such messengers (Col.2:8; 2 Tim.2:16); and there is the loss of reward at the dais of Christ (1 Cor.3:12-15).

Nevertheless there seems to be little of the word of the conciliation in present-day evangelism. Men are told they must entreat God for His favor. Yet the evangel says, "Be conciliated to God," "*as of God entreating* through us . . ." God is not the tyrant, acting impulsively and unfairly, which so many imagine Him to be. Not at all. In fact, once we appreciate the conciliation and its basis in the sin offering, we will see God as He truly is, having a righteous purpose which He is carrying out in love and power. In no time prior to the present era has His heart of love been so fully revealed. He is entreating the world to come to Him freely and in peace, and yet how few have heard or heeded what He is saying through His ambassadors.

Another false view of God which can be best corrected by the word of the conciliation is that He is merely doing "the best He can." In other words, He wants to make peace but cannot. He is pictured as having to wait on man and man's decision to make peace with Him. But no, God has already acted and has established the conciliation. He is not *waiting* (in uncertainty) for something to be done but rather He awaits (in expectation) man's response to what He has accomplished on our behalf.

In recent years, religious books have become very popular. Paraphrased versions of the Bible are distributed by the millions. And yet the message of conciliation is seldom heard. When is it broadcast on radio or television? How often even is it heard from the pulpit? People ask, "What is our com-

mission for today?" and a thousand voices compete with a thousand different answers, but how few point to 2 Corinthians 5:20, "For Christ, then, are we ambassadors, as of God entreating through us. We are beseeching for Christ's sake, 'Be conciliated to God!'"

This after all is our "great commission," if we must use such a term. It is true that it is not a popular message because it leaves so little for man to do; but that does not affect the truth of the conciliation nor our responsibility to make it known. Like Paul, but in a more figurative way, we may feel that we are "conducting an embassy in a chain" (Eph.6:20), since the usual means of communication seem to be blocked off to this truth, yet we should remember the results (which God brought forth) from that embassy Paul conducted.

We do not need to compete *against* the frenzied activity of organized religion. But we do need to pray for boldness, expression and vigilance in making known the truth (Eph.6:18-20), "competing *together* in the faith of the evangel" (Phil.1:27). It is our privilege and responsibility to serve as good ambassadors and share the message of conciliation with others; it is not our responsibility to *make* men hear. Our embassy may be only a "still small voice" in comparison to the general din about us, but God will make the seed planted "grow up" (1 Cor.3:7).

WE ARE BESEECHING

Hence we are telling others about peace. We are telling them that when Christ died as the sin offering, He died for their sakes. It was for their salvation and for justification; and, it was also for conciliation. We are telling the world that when Christ became the sin offering God was there in Him conciliating the world to Himself, not reckoning their offenses against them. This is our work, our commission, as ambassadors of Christ.

"But what is the sense of being an ambassador if nobody will listen?" Nobody? We are too concerned about numbers and ways and means of making converts. An ambassador is in the service of the government he represents. It is not his

place to manipulate the lives of others but rather to present the views of his country's leaders. The world says that if your message doesn't seem to be getting across you should change your message. "Let them hear what they want to hear." But as faithful ambassadors of Christ we have no choice (and should desire none) except to tell others about the sin offering and its results. It was through one of His ambassadors that God has revealed the message of conciliation to us; and He also will use us to bring it to others as He wills.

The message we have received is a very simple one. It is that peace has been established through the sacrifice of Christ. God has removed the barriers of enmity and opened up the gates of fellowship and access to Himself. Hence, for Christ's sake, we are now beseeching, "Be conciliated to God."

Though God was in Christ conciliating the world to Himself (2 Cor.5:19), nevertheless the world remains ignorant of this glorious reality. Hence the need for the practical entreaty, "*Be conciliated to God.*" While we *were* conciliated to God through the death of His Son (Rom.5:10), we now need to "become what we are."

Hence with these words, God is asking the world to recognize and enjoy the peace He has made. The major reason the world does not like this message is that it leaves so little for the world to do. The world would prefer to make its own peace with God in its own way on its own terms. It would like to establish peace through toil and asceticism so that it could have something to boast in. To the world it is not religious enough just to accept what He has done.

GOD AND THE SIN OFFERING

"For the One not knowing sin, He [God] makes to be a sin offering for our sakes . . ." These are perhaps the most solemn words in all of the gospel. Christ was perfect in every way and deserved nothing except life and glory. Instead, for our sakes, He experienced death and shame. This was wrong, and yet it was the wrong which made all wrongs right. This is certainly a mystery to our feeble minds, almost beyond our

ability to grasp. But perhaps we can see this much at least, that what occurred there at the cross was the result of God's own actions. God *made* Christ to become the sin offering. This also connects with the statement in verse 19 that "*God was in Christ, conciliating the world to Himself . . .*"

Where was God when Christ was crucified? He was in Christ Whom He made to become the sin offering for our sakes. Let us not be afraid to face this truth. God had fore-known the shedding of Christ's blood before the disruption of the world (1 Pet.1:20), having purposed its gracious and glorious results. He was not taken by surprise. His hand was upon each step, and nothing occurred outside His own counsel. This is vital, for otherwise there could be no certainty and assurance that the purpose of the cross had been gained.

THE WORK OF AN AMBASSADOR

In today's world, ambassadors generally are diplomats and negotiators. They seek benefits for their own countries and often must use crafty means in order to achieve their ends. We are to be ambassadors of a different sort. We have nothing to negotiate, for the conciliation has already been established, and it is now in effect. Instead of negotiating a peace, we are informing others of the peace God has already made. We do not seek benefits for ourselves, for God blesses us with every spiritual blessing among the celestials in Christ. Rather we seek this rich enjoyment of peace and security for all. We ask nothing except that others recognize and receive the benefits of the conciliation.

We are to tell others of what our God has done for them. Our "portfolio" bulges with the reports of His favor. But it all centers around this one supreme and astounding fact, that God was there when Christ became the sin offering. He was there effecting not only our salvation and that of all mankind, but He was destroying the barriers erected by our offenses, and making peace. We have been appointed as ambassadors of Christ to deliver this message of grace. How honored we are! To God be the glory!

D.H.H.

THE EQUIPOISE OF TRUTH

In our quest for faithfulness, let us realize and rejoice that, ultimately speaking, maturity in faith is not our own work but is God's work in us. While the usual claim that the believer "must cooperate with the Holy Spirit" is, strictly speaking, true, yet as popularly understood, it is false. This is because the self-control which one must indeed exercise in order not to quench the spirit, is itself a *fruit of the spirit* (Gal.5:23). Therefore, if it may truly be said of us that we have been "cooperative," let us not boast in ourselves that this is so, but thank and praise God that this is so.

Each believer belongs to the Lord; thus we are His "slaves." Accordingly, we are, so to say, His "household servants" (AV), His "domestics" (CV, Rom.14:4). Since we are but domestics ourselves, it is not our place to be judging *Another's* domestic (Rom. 14:4a). We are not in charge. Consequently, not to us, but "to his own Master he is standing or falling" (Rom.14:4b). Concerning the fellow domestic who has been "infirm in the faith" (Rom. 14:1), the good news is this: the time will come when "*he will be made to stand, for the Lord is able to make Him stand*" (Rom.14:4c).

Accordingly, then, in the seeking of faithfulness, let us take Proverbs 4:7 to heart, which is: "The principal thing is *wisdom*; acquire wisdom, and with all your acquisition, acquire *understanding*." Similar wise counsel is found in Proverbs 23:23: "Buy the truth, and do not sell it, [even as] wisdom and *discipline* and understanding" (Prov.23:23).

When we "*understand*" a certain thing, we truly discern its meaning. "*Wisdom*" is the faculty by which we make the highest and best application of knowledge. Since all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are concealed in God (Col.2:3), "the assurance of understanding" (Col.2:2) is that which we have when God makes our faith grow up (1 Cor.3:5-7). Until then, "it is the glory of Elohim to conceal a matter" (Prov.25:2).

While progress in the faith is *by* the grace of God alone, it is nonetheless *through* our own efforts, according to our strongest desires. Therefore we must recognize the vital place as well of self-*discipline*. Thus one who is wise will realize that "a man cannot get anything if it should not be given him out of heaven" (John 3:27), and that we must "become *doers* of the word, and not only listeners, beguiling [our]selves" (James 1:22).

To God be the Glory

THE MYTH OF "FREE WILL"

WE ALL need to see to our "responsibilities," thus fulfilling our *duties*. By practicing proper "role responsibility," we learn to live "responsibly," which is to say dutifully and uprightly. It is important for us to realize that we are "responsible" for our actions, in the sense of being answerable for them or subject to their consequences. This is simply to say, we are *accountable*, or subject to judgment, for our deeds.

Accordingly, we must realize that the so-called "fatalistic" notion is false (even as absurd) which affirms that since the particulars of our future course are fixed, therefore we might just as well be careless as careful, while making no more attempt to pursue a life of virtue and industry than of sin and sloth.

Furthermore, we must remember that we act voluntarily, according to our own choices, apart from compulsion (i.e., force, contrary to our own will). Good results require good actions; and good actions require good decisions, according to self-discipline. Therefore, in the words of the Psalmist, let us "withdraw from evil and do good" (Psa.34:14a; 37:27a).

For discipline in righteousness, *these* are the things we need to know, and be reminded of, even as teach to our children; not prideful notions of "free will" which preclude our being able to thank God alone for our virtues while trusting in His wise and good design concerning all.

It by no means follows from the reality and importance of role responsibility that what is actually contended for by those who advocate "free will," therefore exists. We do well to recognize this simply because it is true; yet especially because of the deleterious consequences of believing in free will.

Free will, in fact, is an untenable position. Either events occur due to that which causes them to occur, or events occur

due to nothing at all. If what happens is caused to happen, it cannot be prevented from happening. *And*, if what happens is not caused to happen, neither can it be prevented from happening. In the former example, the event is the effect of its cause; in the latter example, the event is not an effect, and it has no cause.

But one has no more ultimate control over that which simply occurs, due to nothing at all, than over that which is made to occur, as the effect of a cause. In the former case, determinism is affirmed; in the latter case, indeterminism is affirmed. But in either case, ultimate control is precluded.

Ultimate control is sometimes technically termed “categorical could-have-done-otherwise.” The common name for categorical could-have-done-otherwise, is “free will.”¹

The above considerations prove that whether determinism, indeterminism, or some combination of the two constitutes the true account of human affairs, in any case, the notion of ultimate control (i.e., free will or moral responsibility) is necessarily mistaken.

Whether or not *God* determines “whatsoever comes to pass” (as affirmed in the illustrious Westminster Confession), is not the issue insofar as the question of whether or not free will is true is concerned. The point is that free will is false whether determinism is true or false; consequently, free will is false, whether *God* determines all events, some events, or no events.

The fact that “freewill responsibility” not only is not true but cannot possibly be true, may be cogently argued as follows:

If determinism is true, then all events, including any person’s decisions and actions, are fully determined by circumstances which are ultimately beyond that person’s control. If this is so,

1. Free will, in turn, is sometimes termed “moral responsibility.” This is a most confusing expression; for indeed, as explained above, there is an uncontested sense in which our wills are free and our actions of a moral nature, we ourselves being “responsible for” our actions. No such considerations, however, constitute any proof whatsoever that, ultimately speaking, under the conditions that obtained, our past actions could have been different than they were.

then that person could not have decided or acted differently. Hence, the person was not free [in the usual freewill sense].

If determinism is false, then there are at least some events which are not fully determined by antecedent circumstances. To the extent that human decisions and actions are among those events which are not fully determined, those decisions and actions occur by pure chance. But what occurs by pure chance is not within a person’s control. Therefore, to the extent that decision and action are not determined, the person is unfree.

But determinism is either true or false. Hence a person is never free with respect to decisions, actions, or the results of actions.

But a person is morally responsible for an action or occurrence only if he is free in that respect.

Therefore, no one is ever morally responsible for any decision, action, or outcome.”²

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF TRUTH³

All the details of the life of every person, exist among that class of statements which happen to be true. This is so whether or not we know them to be true, and, whether or not any certain of their particulars concern the past or future. Anything that is true concerning the future, as much so as anything that is true concerning the past, is timelessly true today.

This is so simply on the basis that there is such a thing as truth, and that this has nothing at all to do with the passage of time. Though truth often concerns events which once were not, which later come to be and later still cease to be, the truth

2. See the discussion of this dilemma in A. S. Kaufman, “Responsibility, Moral and Legal,” *THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF PHILOSOPHY*, pp.183-188, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan, 1967); cited in the Introduction to *FREEDOM OF THE WILL*, by Jonathan Edwards, The Library of Liberal Arts edition, pp.xxxii,xxxiii, by Arnold S. Kaufman and William K. Frankena (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1969).

3. Portions of this present writing were adapted from *METAPHYSICS*, second edition, chapter six, pp.58-71, by Richard Taylor (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1974).

itself concerning these events never *becomes* true, nor *ceases* to be true; it simply *is* true.

Now that which *is* true concerning any particular event entails the *certainty* of that event. This is because that which is true cannot possibly be untrue; for then it may be untrue, which is contradictory to the fact that it is true. Similarly, the certainty of an event entails its *inevitability*. This is because that which is certain cannot possibly be uncertain; for then it may be uncertain, which is contradictory to the fact that it is certain.

Whether any individual event should be a past event or a future event is beside the point. Therefore, the events of the future are as inevitable as the events of the past.

It is important to realize that every meaningful statement, regardless of subject, is either true or else it is false. There is no middle ground. This principle thus is appropriately called the law of the excluded middle. It has nothing to do with what tense the statement happens to express, nor with the question whether anyone, man or God, happens to know whether it is true or false.

In principle, it is vouchsafed by the apostle Paul in his instruction concerning supervisors in the ecclesia, that they are to “*uphold* the faithful word according to the teaching, that [they] may be *able* to entreat with *sound* teaching *as well as* to expose those who *contradict*” (Titus 1:9).

No such ministry would be possible apart from one’s acknowledgement and consistent application of this first principle of sound thinking, “the law of the excluded middle.” It is only on a basis of this principle that we are able to judge whether one proposition contradicts another or not. Nothing could be more foolish, then, than the false piety of repudiating the very rudiments of sanity and soundmindedness through their dismissal as being but “vain philosophy.” As was declared unto Peter, “What God cleanses, do not *you* count contaminating!” (*cp* Acts 10:15b).

THE WISDOM AND KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

Let us remember that God knows all; which is to say that

He is omniscient. “If our heart should be censuring us, God is greater than our heart, and He knows all” (1 John 3:20). That is, God knows everything that is true; which includes the knowledge concerning every false statement that it *is* false, as surely as the knowledge concerning every true statement that it is true.

He therefore knows not only the day and hour of your birth, but He knows, as you surely do not, the date of your death, even the exact moment and the circumstances thereof. Accordingly, then, He knows whether an ant walked across my desk last night, and if so what ant it was, how long it remained, and so forth. This is because He knows every truth about this insect that there is. Similarly, of course He knows when some ant will again appear on my desk, if ever. He knows the number of hairs on my head, notes the fall of every sparrow, knows why it fell and why it was going to fall. This is because God knows, concerning any statement whatever that anyone could formulate, that it is true, in case it is, and otherwise, that it is false. That which His prophets proclaim, is simply that minute portion of the sum of His knowledge which He is pleased to communicate to men.

Consider the further example that it is true that President Kennedy was murdered. This means that it was true that he was going to be murdered: that the future *would* include that very event. That is, if the statement made now, that President Kennedy has been murdered, is a true one, then, most assuredly, the prediction made before the event, that he was going to be murdered, was true as well. The two statements have exactly the same content, and are in fact the same statement, except for variation in tense.

It is correct as well to say that the murder of President Kennedy was inevitable. This is because no man is able to avoid what is truly described, nor bring about what is falsely described. No one can make false that which is true, any more than make true that which is false.

The true answer to the question, then, “Will President Kennedy ever be murdered?” should such a question have been

asked (as it undoubtedly was asked by many) prior to that fateful day of November 22, 1963, would have been, "Yes, he will be murdered; that is the *only* possible thing that can happen."

Of course it is true that *if* better precautions had been taken, then President Kennedy would not have been murdered. But then it is true as well that since they were *not* taken, *neither were they going to be* taken.

THE POWER OF TRUTH

It bears repeating that either a statement is true or else it is false. Hence a statement concerning the occurrence of a future event is either true or else it is false. Therefore, since statements concerning the occurrence of future events are *either* true or else they are false, it is incorrect to say that statements concerning future events are *neither* true *nor* false.

All that has happened and all that will happen, is a part of whatever is true. Therefore, it is incorrect to say that truth concerning some future events does not yet exist. This is because *whatever will* happen is that concerning which it is now already true that it will happen.

Since the truth concerning all that will happen already exists, it follows concerning any certain past event that, before it happened, it was already true that it was going to happen. Hence if I should eat an apple tomorrow, it was already true today that I *would* eat an apple tomorrow, even as that, on the morrow, I could not *not* eat an apple. These principles are as true concerning all events and all persons, as they are concerning some events and some persons. Whether the subject at hand is myself and my eating of an apple tomorrow, Satan and his mobilization of the nations for battle at the end of the thousand years, or God Himself and His swift response thereunto in sending fire out of heaven to devour them (Rev. 20:7-9)—*whatever will* happen is that concerning which it is now already true that it will happen; and, already true that it will inevitably happen.

It is neither the pastness nor the futurity of an event that proves an event's existence inevitable; it is rather the existence

of the truth concerning it that proves its existence inevitable. Whatever *has* already happened, cannot avoid its past existence; and, whatever *will* yet happen, cannot avoid its future existence. This is because all the details, past or future, of the life of every person, are incorporated within the compass of that which is true. Therefore, whatever is true concerning the future is no more avoidable than whatever is true concerning the past.

Every argument against the teaching that future occurrences are as unavoidable as past occurrences, is based upon the assumption that we are free to realize various alternative future possibilities—the very thing that is at issue.

Sound logic and conclusive evidence can only bring conviction to those who are open to conviction and capable of being convinced. In His own time, such logic and evidence is indeed "powerful to God toward the pulling down of bulwarks; pulling down reckonings and every height elevating itself against the knowledge of God, and leading into captivity every apprehension into the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:4,5). But before such a time and apart from the special illuminating grace attending thereunto, sound logic and conclusive evidence are powerless indeed in the face of an opinion nourished by invincible pride. It has well been said that most men would sooner lose their souls than be divested of that dignity which they imagine rests upon their freedom of will.

VESSELS IN THE POTTER'S HANDS

It needs to be realized even in the case of, humanly speaking, unintentional deaths by accident, that such events occur according to divine appointment. In Israel of old, if a man smote another inadvertently, that is, apart from "malicious intent," still, it was to be understood that "the One, Elohim, He had *fated* him into his hand" (Ex. 21:12,13).

Similarly, Samson, contrary to the revealed will of God through the law of Moses, sought to take a Philistine woman as his wife. His parents attempted to dissuade him from his sin, but Samson would only say, "Get her for me: for she

pleases me well.’ But his father and mother did not know that *it was of Yahweh* [that this occurred], for He sought an occasion against the Philistines” (Judges 14:3,4). In violating the revealed (or preceptive) will of God, Samson thus fulfilled the decretive will (or hidden intention) of God.

Samson was a vessel in the Potter’s hands; he was decidedly *not* a “free moral agent” (in the usual “freewill” sense of this phrase). Yet, just as surely, he *was* subject to the consequences of his actions.

It is not at all, as some will claim, that such principles “do not make any sense”: they make perfect sense. It is merely that men *do not approve* of them, and, unwittingly, honor the ethics of the world and the defilements of their own conscience above the Word of God.

Since God is love, even as good and wise in the highest possible degree, He always does what is best. And, God knows which course of historical events, considered not only on the whole but in view of their every detail, would have the greatest tendency toward the ultimate good. He has therefore made the eons (*cp* Heb.1:2) in such a way that the eonian times should comprise those very events, and no others, which, with respect to His purpose, He deems best. Indeed, He would *sin*—which He cannot do, for He cannot deny Himself—were He to arrange the course of history in any way but the best way; or fail to arrange it at all, in some respects, thus leaving it to chance that some events might well occur that would not be best, in respect of His purpose.

Since, within the eonian times, to accord with His purpose, God knows that, among men, it is best that there should be “vessels” both of indignation as well as of mercy (Rom.9:21), even as, within the ecclesia, that there should be “utensils” both of honor and dishonor (2 Tim.2:20,21), it is of Him that there *are* vessels both of indignation and of mercy, even as utensils both of honor and dishonor. In light of these august considerations, we wish only to reply, “to Him be the glory!”

To those who wish to scoff or complain in light of the fact that God still “blames” (i.e., charges with wrongdoing and holds

accountable) men for their sins when they have therein fulfilled His intention, we would merely reply with Paul: “O man! *who are you, to be sure*, who are answering again to God? That which *is* molded will not protest to the molder, ‘Why do you *make* me thus?’ Or has not the potter the right over the clay, out of the same kneading to *make* one vessel, indeed, for honor, yet one for dishonor? Now if God, wanting to display His indignation and to make His powerful doings known, carries, with much patience, the vessels of indignation, adapted for destruction, it is that He should also be making known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He makes ready before for glory—us, whom He calls also, not only out of the Jews, but out of the nations also” (Rom.9:20-24; *cp* 9:19).

REJECTION AND COMPROMISE

Let us note well that the events of the future are inevitable—period; *not*, regardless of what we do. It does not follow from the inevitability of future events, that any certain events are inevitable “no matter what.” Future events do not come about in spite of what we do, but because of what we do, even as because of other occurrences which affect us, in addition to our own deeds. Therefore, diligence, duty, and discipline, are as important to those who reject free will as they are to those who accept it.

We need not fear the consequences of our unequivocal rejection of “free will” so long as we maintain such a stance not in isolation but in close connection with a strong emphasis upon the indispensability of *self*-discipline—albeit a self-discipline which is the fruit of divine grace. All that one will “lose” by the rejection of free will is a strong incentive to pride and anger. Only those who take pleasure in these sins, will regret to see the primary agency which fosters them meet its justly-deserved demise.

The teaching of God’s deity in itself is of a wholly salutary nature; any foolish misuse thereof may not be charged against it. The man who believes the truth that *all* is of God—who also loves and pursues righteousness, who is contrite and

ashamed when he sins, while longing for and seeking self-reform—should not be faulted for believing that his sin was inevitable. His sin *was* inevitable, in the counsels of God, and will yet redound to His glory. The man who believes and speaks thus is not making an “excuse,” but is rather giving an account. He *is* “excused” from having “misused his free will,” for he does not *have* a free will.

We must remember that free will is nearly universally accepted as not only true but as essential both to morality and justice. Since this is so, and yet men are *not* in ultimate control of their decisions, it should not surprise us that most are unable to transcend their own ethics and prejudices—not to mention emotions and confusion of mind—concerning this theme. Indeed, it is only in the grace of God that any are able to do so.

Nearly all reject the proposition that free will is false, even when confronted with the issues which so easily decide the question. Yet a few, ones who to some extent may perceive the force of the argument against free will, while not overtly rejecting the proposition that such a belief is false, resourcefully still find one way or another to excuse themselves from accepting it.

May we not be startled by such rejection of truth. It must be realized that neither this present writing nor any other will have any widespread impact upon popular error: for it is written that “the era *will* be when they will not tolerate sound teaching, but, their hearing being tickled, they *will* heap up for themselves teachers in accord with their own desires, and, indeed, they *will* be turning their hearing away from the truth, yet *will* be turned aside to myths” (2 Tim.4:3,4).

Some, while formally acknowledging that free will is false, nonetheless, whether at work or in the home, commonly speak and comport themselves as if it were true. Most such ones, if not oblivious to or at least uncaring concerning this inconsistency, will appraise it as being, at most, only a minor deficiency. This is so, even though so much of their self-pride, even as impatience and anger toward others, is the direct result of their practical acceptance of free will. It is not that they occa-

sionally lapse into such inconsistencies, but that such an outlook constitutes their habitual way of life.

A few have even said that, “for our own good, we need to think, and practically believe, in such a way so as to hold ourselves responsible [in a “freewill” sense] for our own behavior.”

That, however, is the equivalent of saying that, “for our own good, we need to think, and practically believe, in such a way so as to hold ourselves to be that which we do not actually hold ourselves to be”; that, for our own good, we need to hold to that which we know to be false.

How we wish that such ones might have as great a zeal for the repudiation of what is false, as they claim to have fear of the misuse of what is true! Obviously, if we would be faithful, we must not misuse the truth; but we must first of all *freely accept the truth while living according to its principles*; otherwise faithfulness is impossible. Let us never imagine that what we need, “for our own good,” is a healthy dose of sheer falsehood.

The man who does not believe in free will, certainly has uncommon insight. But the individual who does not merely disbelieve the myth of free will, but positively believes the glorious truth that *all* is out of, through, and for *God*, and, to His glory (Rom.11:36), has been given a rare gift indeed. Perhaps only one condition among men is even rarer still, and that is for one who does indeed believe that all is out of, through, and for God, substantially to apply his belief both to his own practical affairs and to those of the world around him, doing so in a truly beneficial way.

Yet no such positive and constructive course can even be undertaken, until one takes the preliminary step of recognizing that, in any event, free will does *not* exist.

In anticipation of blessed days to come in which all our brethren will gladly join us in proclaiming, “out of Him and through Him and for Him is all: to Him be the glory for the eons! Amen!” (Rom.11:36), may those of us who acclaim Him thus even today, be speaking the truth in love, with all humility and meekness.

J.R.C.



It has been quite some time since I last wrote at any length on the theme of free will. We would gladly address this subject more frequently and comprehensively; yet it is a question how this may be done expediently. Though it is a truth of vital importance, the truth concerning God's deity even as of the untenability of free will is nonetheless a teaching which few indeed are able to receive.

Ironically, many who are most sensitive to repudiate the usual worldly pleasures or excesses, seem to be most insensitive to the repudiation of prideful principles. Yet since, in the ordinary affairs of life, so many believers in universal reconciliation seem to be as pleased as any others ultimately to take the credit to themselves for their own virtues while stressing the supposed freewill responsibility of their associates in their failings, my prayer is that, in the grace of God, an explicit word along these lines may prove to be both timely and edifying.



“REMEMBER JESUS CHRIST”

Let us “Be remembering Jesus Christ—Who *has* been roused from among the dead, [and] *is* of the seed of David—*according to my evangel*” (2 Tim.2:8). The words, “Who has been roused from among the dead, *is* of the seed of David,” are interjectory. The primary revelation here is: “Be remembering Jesus Christ . . . *according to* [i.e., on a foundational basis of] *my evangel*.” That Christ *has* been roused from among the dead, and *is* of the seed of David, none who are naming the name of the Lord will care to deny. But how few there are who seek to be “remembering” Him, foundationally, according to Paul's evangel. Few are aware that there even *is* such a thing as “Paul's evangel,” and fewer still have clear light concerning it. Howbeit, the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: *The Lord knew* those Who are His, and, Let everyone who is naming the name of the Lord, withdraw from *injustice*” (2 Tim.2:19). Hence, “whatever is *true*, whatever is *grave*, whatever is *just*, whatever is *pure*, whatever is *agreeable*, whatever is *renowned*—if there is any virtue, and if any *applause*, be taking these into account: What you learned also, and accepted and hear and perceived *in me*, these be putting into practice, and the God of peace will be with you” (Phil.4:8,9).

“For the rest, my brethren, *be rejoicing in the Lord*. To be writing the same to you is not, indeed, irksome for me, *yet it is your security* [to hear and heed]” (Phil.3:1). While our *position* is always secure “in Christ,” with all the future blessings in grace that this entails, our *condition* “in the Lord,” as a practical matter of faithfulness, is that which, by the grace of God, we must ever seek to maintain.

THE HOLY SPIRIT OF GOD

QUESTION: “The Concordant Version's rendering ‘holy spirit’ (instead of ‘Holy Spirit’) seems strange to me. When I try to show my friends how accurate and helpful the Concordant Version is, they are stumbled by the rendering ‘holy spirit,’ instead of ‘the Holy Spirit,’ by which phrase they understand ‘the third Person of the Holy Trinity.’ In any case, why do you use a small ‘h’ and ‘s’ instead of a capital ‘H’ and ‘S,’ especially since you use a capital ‘H’ on ‘He,’ ‘His,’ and ‘Him’ where these pronouns are used in reference to God or to Christ? Also, what is the difference between ‘holy spirit’ and ‘*the* holy spirit,’ in those instances in which the Greek definite article (as indicated by ‘the’) is included in the Original? And finally, in texts in which the definite article does *not* appear, is it correct to say ‘*a* holy spirit’ instead of simply ‘holy spirit’?”

ANSWER: I sympathize with you on the problem of the lower case “holy spirit” in the CV, which is an attempt to be neutral in translation. In the Explanatory Information section of the CONCORDANT LITERAL NEW TESTAMENT WITH KEYWORD CONCORDANCE (p.620), it is stated that, “[in nearly all cases,] it is left to the reader to decide for himself which aspect of SPIRIT is in view in a given occurrence It was decided to keep personal concepts out of the controversy by not capitalizing the word *spirit* in its various occurrences. This should not be taken as a symptom of irreverence toward GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT but rather as a sign of human incompetence to deal with the problem in a satisfactory manner, without injecting personal opinion, and thus detracting from the laud of His glory.” Perhaps a “better” solution (though probably impractical in a version) would be to set this phrase in small caps, as “HOLY SPIRIT,” as I sometimes have done in expositions, at least in the midst of exegesis.

Through fallacious thinking (e.g., certain false assumptions as to idiom), it is sometimes possible to misuse the fact of the presence of the definite article (“the”). As a rule, however, noting its presence can be quite helpful. One important point is that “the” can always be converted either to “this” (near demonstrative pronoun) or “that” (far demonstrative) without changing the sense, though often with the result of the *clarification* of the sense. This helpful practice of noting that “the’ [actually] equals ‘this,” cannot change the sense of any text; but, besides affording clarification, it will often manifest the invalid nature of popular reasoning such as that founded on the common expression “*the* gospel,” from which it is concluded that “there is only one gospel,” when sane logic on this very point will preclude such a conclusion.

Where the *definite* article is not present, however, it does not follow that the (English) *indefinite* article (“a”) is necessarily to be understood. That depends upon the nature of the case. For example, take the case of “HOLY SPIRIT.” Unless, in some instance, the particular *usage* entails a reference to a specific, *discrete* “HOLY SPIRIT,” we should simply say, “HOLY SPIRIT” (instead of *either* “*the* HOLY SPIRIT,” or “*a* HOLY SPIRIT”). But where, again, in the nature of the case, it is evident that a *discrete* entity *is* in view, then we not only *may* but *should* employ the indefinite article (e.g., “*a* day of salvation; 2 Cor.6:2). If, in such instances, we were to use no article at all, (1) we would fail to indicate the fact that a discrete entity is in view; and (2) we would violate the dictates of good English. Conversely, if, in such cases, we should employ the definite article, those who falsely imagine that its import is “the *one and only* [such entity],” instead of, its true sense, “[this or that] [such entity],” would be given grist for their mill.

Hence, in answer to your question concerning instances in which the definite article is not included in the Original, while in such cases it would not necessarily be mistaken to say “*a* HOLY SPIRIT,” it would only be *correct* to do so in instances in which it was evident that a discrete HOLY SPIRIT was in view. In most usages of Greek nouns in cases where they appear

without the definite article, however, a discrete entity *is* in view, and, therefore, in English, the indefinite article “a” should be employed (as in 2 Cor.6:2). This is because, while, in Greek, the idea conveyed by the English “a” is understood (not expressed), in English, according to custom, it must be expressed.

In trying to help your friends who are hindered by tradition, point out to them that *holy* means “consecrated” (or “devoted”), and *spirit* means “imperceptible power.” Hence, “HOLY SPIRIT” means “consecrated imperceptible power.” Now, “[imperceptible] power” is a *thing*, not a person. Hence, if, in any certain passages (such as Acts 13:2), personal qualities should be ascribed to HOLY SPIRIT, it follows that such usages are not literal, but figurative. They are the figure termed Personification, by which personal qualities are ascribed to non-personal entities, even as in the case of Law, Sin, Death, Righteousness, Grace, and so forth.

In some usages of HOLY SPIRIT, a compound figure is involved, by which (as in Acts 13:2) not only is the usage a matter of Personification, but of Metonymy; that is, of the *association* of the personified entity with an actual being, namely, God Himself. It is also helpful to note that wherever we read of “HOLY SPIRIT,” or of “the HOLY SPIRIT,” this is a contraction (hence, the figure of Omission, or Ellipsis) of “HOLY SPIRIT [e.g., which is of God],” or “the HOLY SPIRIT [*of God*]” (*cp* Eph.4:30).

These are all objective facts that must be intelligently grasped. They should be wholeheartedly embraced and applied by all, prior to any judgments as to interpretation. Indeed, apart from such knowledge, legitimate hermeneutics is impossible.

One should also become acquainted with what orthodox Trinitarianism actually affirms,¹ noting especially that—be its exponents ever so zealous in their claim that “Jesus is the second Person of the Trinity”—*Trinitarianism’s own interpretation* of the sense in which this proposition is to be understood,

1. *cf Unsearchable Riches*, “The Doctrine of the Triune God,” vol.22, pp.167-192.

entails it also being so that Jesus is only God in a sense that is incompatible with the proposition that He is *literally* and *absolutely* (hence, identificationally) God.²

Many of our friends seem unable to concentrate sufficiently to grasp such particulars, or else are disinclined to do so. Yet those outside are usually far too prejudiced against our teaching to give it a fair hearing; and unless given special grace, will not thank us for proving their beliefs to be false. This makes it impossible for them to grasp what we are actually saying.

Most would have us simplify things more than we can or should. They want our explanations to be sufficiently simple that they themselves need not gain any new proficiencies, nor otherwise put themselves to much inconvenience.

It is all too human simply to “get on a bandwagon,” thus avoiding the labor of adequate study. One bandwagon, in acceptance of Trinitarianism, is promoted by appeals to human authority and tradition, and especially by the bias-inducing claim that one’s acceptance of the tenets of Trinitarianism is essential to salvation (however unthoughtfully those tenets may be embraced). The other bandwagon, in rejection of Trinitarianism, having insufficient interest in accuracy and fairness, is often promoted through misrepresentation, mockery, and the destruction of straw men (in its “disproofs” of Trinitarianism). Of course if we would be faithful, we must avoid the latter wagon as surely as the former.

In light of such needs, then, for progress toward maturity, may we “not cease praying,” for one another and for all, “requesting that [we] may be filled full with the realization of [God’s] will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, you to walk worthily of the Lord for all pleasing, bearing fruit in every good work, and *growing in the realization of God*” (Col.1:9).
J.R.C.

2. cf *Unsearchable Riches*, “One God and One Lord,” vol.85, pp.215-224; cp “One God and One Lord,” part two, vol.85, pp.251-263; “Yahweh is the Only Elohim,” vol.86, pp.10-18; and “The Only True God,” vol.86, pp.63-74.