

STRAIGHTWAY

**"AND STRAIGHTWAY THEY FORSOOK THEIR NETS, AND FOLLOWED HIM" (MARK 1:18).
CHRISTIAN PURITIES FELLOWSHIP**

God's Strange Work Amidst a Strange Land

Dr. H. T. Spence

Amidst the increased intensity of the strangeness of this hour in history, the Bible also reveals the final weapon of the Devil. This great weapon is the Devil's fine-tuning of deception. If it were possible, the very elect would be deceived (Matt. 24:24).

Five Needed Realities for Discernment

In order to discern his age, the Christian must possess five realities of life. First, he must be born again. The reason many professing people do not see what is happening in our day is simply that they are not born again. Jesus stated in John 3 that except a man be born again he can neither *enter* nor *see* the kingdom of God (vv. 5, 3). The new birth provides (for the first time) spiritual sight for one to see his age.

Second, one must believe in the supreme authority of God's Word. The supreme authority of God's Word is the infallible authority that must be believed even if church, government, or

family contradict it. Only by accepting this supreme authority will one be able to see his age.

Third, one must also have a daily relationship with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the illuminator of God's Word. Although one certainly needs a daily relationship with Christ, it is also imperative that he have that daily relationship with the Holy Spirit to illuminate the Word of God for a spiritual sight of his age.

Fourth, one likewise must be separated from the world. If one is worldly and carnal, he automatically carries a partial blindness toward his age. This partial blindness limits spiritual sight about his age. All Christians must believe in biblical separation from the world.

Finally, one must have a biblical victory over pride. This lack of victory is a problem for a Christian because he does not want to acknowledge when he is wrong. When one does not

see spiritually, he may be afraid to acknowledge it. Nonetheless, he must let pride go when true sight is finally revealed. Just swallow the pride, and thank God, the sight came!

This world is blind to itself. Likewise, often the Christian tends to be blind to himself. When the Bible warns that we “be not deceived” (Luke 21:8), it also tells us, “Let no man deceive you” (2 Thess. 2:3) and to make sure that we do not “deceive ourselves” (1 John 1:8).

God’s Strange Work

A final perspective in the Word of God about this word *strange* must be noted regarding the End Time of these last days. (God’s people must carefully see and understand this.) When the world leaders, its culture, its religion, and its humanity become so strange

and peculiar in their ways, likewise, God Himself will begin working in shocking and unusual ways that almost seem to contradict His ways in the past. From time to time, the Bible unveils strange workings from God not only to the world but also to the true Christian. Once the event passes and time reveals the effect of that work, it may not seem so strange in the light of His purposes and plans.

Perhaps the earliest time of God’s strange work was at the fall of Adam and Eve. Before God turned the parents of all humanity out of the Garden of Eden, He declared a strange work that seemed to have been a curse rather than a help to this first couple, amidst the plight of sin into which they had entered. God had made a perfect world, a perfect environment, a perfect earth for the full convenience of man. But once the fall came, God immediately brought changes to the woman, the man, and the earth, which seemed to add to their trouble. Would not things have been better had God permitted nature to continue in its perfection with Adam and Eve remaining the same and no additional adversities? Looking back over it, God in His wisdom and justice mercifully limited man and nature.

To the woman, sorrow and pains of life would be greatly increased in a variety of ways. In sorrow and pain she would bring forth children. Her desire

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**Published by the
Christian Purities Fellowship
The Witness Outreach of
Foundations Bible College**

**P. O. Box 1166
Dunn, NC 28335-1166
800-849-8761**

WWW.STRAIGHTWAYONLINE.ORG

**Provided free of charge.
Contributions welcomed to assist
with postage and printing.**

would be to her husband rather than away from him, and he would rule over her. Since Adam listened to his wife in partaking of the forbidden fruit, the ground that he was to till and cultivate with ease would be cursed on his account, and in misery he would eat the fruit of the ground all the days of his life. It was as if God had said, "On thy account I will do this."

God also commanded that the ground would bring forth thorns and thistles; it would fight back against the man, yielding only meager quantities. Man's life would be a lifelong continuance of the soil until he returns to the ground. Man will have just brief respite between the portions of his work and the moments he will sit down to eat. Because sin now rules the heart of man, he will need an earth that constantly fights against him in order to help subdue him in his sins, and in the hope of cultivating some measure of character in his life though fallen. These curses were to come progressively, getting worse as man became deeper in his sin; it continues to be so, and it will be so until the Millennium brings about the change of abundance and fruitfulness and the partial lifting of the curse. Until the Lord comes, nature itself will grow worse; then God must bring the great release of nature from the sins of man.

Another strange working of God is found during the days of Job. We

should understand that until Job's day, God naturally blessed with long life and prosperity all righteous men who lived true to Him. The Old Testament gives promises concerning natural blessings. (Charismatics falsely keep drawing from the Old Testament for this matter of prosperity and health.) These blessings were to the land, the longevity of life, and the abundance of possessions. However, in the New Testament God begins to look at the blessings from a spiritual perspective. Instead of long life, it is eternal life (which is a quality of life). It is the health of a soul; it is the health of a walk with God.

When God permitted Job to be smitten by the Devil, Job's friends reasoned in their arguments from the perspective of God's usual workings with man at that time—that God gives to the righteous prosperity and health. Job never mentioned the Devil. He did not even have a consciousness of the Devil in the sufferings he was experiencing. Job completely viewed these unusual workings as God bringing him to poverty and physical suffering. Yes, he lost everything. In that dispensation of God's dealings, such tragic loss was not the norm.

This unusual event introduced to the world the enigma of *theodicy*—why do the righteous suffer? At this time God changed the pattern of His dealings and worked with righteous men

in almost the opposite manner. Yet, as the Old Testament continued to unfold, God continued to bless men in the natural, like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Israel. This incident with Job proved that the blessings through wealth and health were not to be the constant, normal ways of God with His people now. Job became a prelude to the coming of God's Son to earth, Who would be given to much suffering and ultimately be seen as Job—forsaken and cursed by God. The suffering of God's righteous people was a strange work of God.

In the New Testament, suffering commingled with grace is God's way of bringing forth godly character. God's Son took on human nature, a nature He had never tested Himself. This was all new to the Son of God; therefore, the Son *learned* obedience in suffering as a man through the strange work of the Father.

The Strange Work of God in Judgment

Let us now draw aside to see God's strange work amidst a strange land. Isaiah 28 records the woe upon Ephraim (representing the northern ten tribes) and their fate in the coming Assyrian Captivity. This record is also a warning to Judah in the South. In verses 14–22, Isaiah rebukes Judah's nobles who were seeking to make a secret arrangement they thought would protect Judah against the Assyrians.

God tells Isaiah their boasted arrangements will entirely fail in the time of trial. The help they sought from Egypt was filled with lies; the overflowing Assyrian scourge will pass through the land and carry all before it. A time of great vexation will follow. God's anger will be poured out upon the land in strange ways.

The prophet pled for the rulers to lay aside their scorning of God and humble themselves. Note Isaiah 28:21:

For the LORD shall rise up as in mount Perazim, he shall be wroth as in the valley of Gibeon, that he may do his work, his strange work; and bring to pass his act, his strange act.

Now, we must carefully note the two geographies of Mount Perazim and the valley of Gibeon. These are two locations where God performed a miracle for Israel. It was at this Mount Perazim (1 Chron. 14:11) where David completely defeated the Philistines under whom Israel had greatly suffered. The valley of Gibeon draws the heart back to Joshua 10, where God performed a mighty miracle in behalf of Israel and defeated a great federation of nations against them. Although God's divine help was with Israel back then, now (Isaiah 28) God is going to be on the side of Israel's enemies!

The people Israel would now suffer as the Philistines had suffered in previous times. Yes, the punishment of His own people by the sword of foreigners

would become a strange work of God in the earth. Instead of God being with His people, He would be with the enemy in the overthrow of His people. It was their strange conduct, their strange living, that caused God's strange actions. They had become, as it were, the Philistines in their living. Therefore, God defeated His own people through Assyria and Babylon, even though many in the days of Jeremiah refused to believe God would ever do such a thing. They believed that God would never destroy Jerusalem, because of the presence of His temple. Even the prophet Habakkuk was surprised that God used Babylon to bring the destruction of Jerusalem.

God's Strangeness upon America

In the past, our own country has witnessed God fight for it when enemies came to destroy us. Remarkably, out of the 242 years since we gained our independence, the United States has been at war 224 years. This fact means that out of our entire history, for only eighteen years has our country not been involved in some war on the earth. Twenty-three major wars have been fought since our independence in 1776. This is the way that God has always dealt with nations in judgment. He has always used countries to overthrow countries. He has used nations to conquer nations. He raises up one to overcome and bring the fall of another; and then in that failure He will raise

another one up to take the victory over the previous nation.

But is God now doing a strange work to overthrow America? Is our sin of rejection so deep because we have known the Gospel deeper than any other nation? The Great Awakenings, the movings of God in the deeper life of Christ, all will bring about a strange work, a strange judgment from God. We certainly believe that God is now giving our country over to its destruction in the moral and Christian apostate implosion of it. God has already given us over to our uncleanness, through the lusts of our own hearts as a nation, to dishonor our own bodies with the debauchery of drugs, tattoos, and body piercings. We have changed the truth of God into a lie—even in the churches—by changing the truth of God's Word. And we are worshiping the creature more than the Creator. God has given us over to vile affections, for even our women are changing the natural use into that which is against nature, and men are burning in their own lusts one to another, working strange sins, dark sins, devilish sins. God has given us over to a reprobate mind, to do those things that are deep in the strangeness of the natural.

But what will be the United States' final overthrow? Will it be through the powers of another nation? Or, will it be by assimilation of those which

are strange to America's beliefs, to its Constitution, to its God and its Gospel of former days? Or, will God permit the Muslims and those of other countries to boldly take over? Or, will we witness a surge of Roman Catholicism, due to the overwhelming number coming across our southern borders? So many are bringing strange cultures, strange gods, and strange lifestyles into our country. Will we be destroyed by an enemy coming in like a flood because God will not lift up a standard of purging or deliverance? The world may witness the greatest nation in history (except for the former glory of Israel) to be dismantled. Its destruction may come like the powers of leprosy and cancer eating away bit by bit (as we sadly witness today) until our nation is taken to the morgue in the stench and putrefaction of death. We kill our unprotected babies with delight; we rob life from the youth as they become the prey of perverse and wicked men who have gone beyond perversion and into the dark, strange world of the inverted. Oh, what strange way, what strange method will God use for the overthrow of America—yea, its annihilation?

Our strange sins demand a strange act of God! Our destruction will not be by the norm of the sword, by the norm of another nation. Our destruction may come from within by many strange acts coming together like locusts to destroy us. It is evident, because of the peculiarity of the strange-

ness of America, God is going to perform a strange act that is going to shock the world!

The Strangeness of God's Work in Trials

Although a strange work of God is coming to our nation, a second strange work of God is coming to His true saints. Note 1 Peter 4:12:

Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you.

Peter reveals there are going to be testings and trials coming with such strangeness and peculiarity that it will cause us to be astonished. Will some of God's precious children experience a depth of certain grief and suffering that will cause us to wonder, "Where is God?" Will there be incidents for weeks on end where we will still be asking God, "Why? Why did You let this happen? Why did this take place?" Such incidents and happenings will be beyond the norm. Such incidents will prove that only the grace of God will bring us through amidst its strangeness and peculiarity. What ways will God now use to intensely begin preparing us for difficult days ahead, strengthening our faith and our hearts?

In this passage the apostle Peter most affectionately declares, "Beloved." "Beloved, think it not strange concern-

ing the fiery [or, burning] trial which is to try [or, test] you." When such strange trials come, we are not to think some strange thing has happened unto us. We are not to say, "God, this is not You; this is not the norm; I have never known You to do this, either to me or others!" We may witness in the coming days such situations among His beloved. When they come, O God, help us not to think as though some strange thing had happened unto us! "But rejoice, inasmuch as we are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy."

We must see that God loves us so much that when He performs a strange, fiery work, those that hear and those that observe may secretly say, "I'm glad that didn't happen to me." There are trials coming, dear brethren, that are going to be so peculiar, so strange, seemingly so foreign to the ways of God, that we will think it is not from Him. In the Book of Job, God Himself tells us the fourfold truth about suffering Job's character.

The opening verse of the book declares he was a (1) perfect man, (2) an upright man, (3) one that feared God, and (4) one that eschewed evil. God forbid we let the Charismatic thinking control our thoughts when dear brethren go through strange trials, by thinking less of them, or thinking that something is lacking. "I have

never had to go through that; I have never experienced that." The people who are thinking such thoughts may be backslidden when they say it. Like the example of Job, the deeper one goes with God, the deeper his testings will be.

Some may ask, "When God sanctifies me, will I have less temptations?" The answer is "No, you will have more." Testings may become greater; temptations may be deeper, all because you are deeper with God. No faith has any worth that cannot be tested. This is why God sends trials. God is not seeking for us to fail and backslide; He seeks to test the faith for strength, to see it remain strong. The Devil tempts to destroy; God tests to strengthen.

In Job 3:25 Job broke his silence after his friends came to visit him: "For the thing which I greatly feared is come upon me, and that which I was afraid of is come unto me." Oh, the commentaries with little insight that presume Job had secretly been living in sin, and that he was afraid it had finally caught up with him. This conclusion was what his friends thought: "God has never done this before to a godly man, so it is obvious, Job; you're not a godly man. You've been sinning secretly."

Amidst a consciousness of God's abundant blessings, have we ever thought, "Oh, God, what would I do if You took all of these away from me?"

Such seasons of contemplative fear, no doubt come to us. It is not a doubt of God; it is just that He has blessed so abundantly. Here is a man with a wife, with children, and with abundance. In the first five verses of Job, just one incident with his children proves the fourfold quality of his character. This is all God needed to reveal to us. "It may be that my children have slighted God." On behalf of his children, Job did not offer up a sin offering; he offered up a burnt offering, an offering of consecration. Yes, he simply said in 3:25, "O God, if You took it all away from me..." It is almost as if, when God brings another blessing into your life, you are almost hesitant to embrace it for the fear that "the Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away; blessed be the name of the Lord."

We must not look at this verse in an improper way. The Hebrew here is "I feared a fear"—supposing it was all taken from me? The next verse reveals this: "I was not in safety [that this thing could never happen], neither had I rest, neither was I quiet; yet trouble came." Oh, the variety of God's providences: He gives things; He continues to give things, precious blessings; and that same providence, in God's mysterious wisdom, takes them away.

We must put the best view on this passage, for this is a godly man; this is not a man who has become afraid that God has found him out. God Himself

will state in 1:8, "Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?" And in 2:3, "and still he holdeth fast his integrity, although thou movedst me against him, to destroy him without cause." This commentary is directly from God!

So, why did God permit these things to come upon Job? Why do the righteous suffer? Why did God not explain to Job before He died His purpose for these trials? *God never revealed "why" to Job.* Yes, dear reader; the burning may get so deep, so fiery, consuming our thoughts, emotions, feelings, and body that we will wonder, "God would have never done this to me."

Persecution may increase upon God's people in the future, even here in America to the point of imprisonment. Persecution could be so intense that it will be like a fiery furnace. It is to prove us. And we must always remember, it is to always turn out for our good. "We know that all things," including the fiery trials, "work together for good to them that love God." This is not true for everyone; it is not true for those who do not love God and who are not called according to His purpose. We must remember that at the time of the writing of 1 Peter, Nero was beginning the first of ten imperial persecutions in Roman history dedicated to destroying Christianity.

The prisons, the torture, the sword, the stake, the lion—all were to threaten the infant church. The Christian religion eventually was declared illegal; this strange world was committed to blotting out the very name of Christian and God. Peter, with tenderness, encouraged them, “Beloved, this is to try you. You must not think it strange.” He does not depreciate the severity of the coming persecution. He calls it a “fiery trial.” Have we ever told the Lord, “I don’t know how much more I can take”? Remember that God’s hand is on the temperature of the trial. Even when the Devil has been given permission, God’s hand is still in control. Peter calls upon his audience to rejoice in that trial, for it will bring them nearer to Christ. It is part of the conformity to His image. And, the fiery trial is the preparation for heaven. Suffering weans the Christian from earthly enjoyments. God is wanting to wean us away from anything that competes in our love for Him. The trial helps to lift up our eyes from the earth and to see by faith the glory that shall be revealed.

Personal trials presently are to prepare us for persecution that is coming. Such a mood and spirit is seething in our country against the Christians. Christians are becoming the object of the anger of the world, believing that Christianity is the troubler of the world’s problems. We must not think it strange that God is permitting

this growing hostility in our country and around the world, because He permitted it against His Son. For the Christian, the problem will be in our thinking. How do you think about your trials?

The Paradox of God

When the Lord healed the palsied man let down from the roof, Luke 5:26 records the people’s response who were crowded into the house:

And they were all amazed, and they glorified God, and were filled with fear, saying, We have seen strange things to day.

This response is a unique paradox in that they glorified God, but they were filled with fear having seen strange things. The phrase “strange things” in the original Greek language is *paradoxis*, from which we receive the English word *paradox*. In contrast to *paradox*, the word *dialecticism* means “two literal opposites”; a *paradox* is two “seeming opposites” molded together for a singular principle, therefore balancing both and negating neither.

This miracle was a paradoxical event; this was a strange thing. The theological systems have always had problems with the paradoxes: “Are you a Calvinist or an Arminian?” Do I have a third choice? Do I have to be either-or? Is there another that brings the brotherly balance to the both?

We are seeing strange things today—

we are seeing paradoxical things. What are the two things that seemed to be opposites in this passage in Luke? The first is this man, a paralytic man with the extreme loss of power of movement. Some aspect of the brain or the spinal cord brought an incapacity of physically functioning in life. Sometimes that is the way people are spiritually; they cannot function well as a Christian. What is the problem? Is it carnality? Is it timidity? Is it fear? What is it within an individual that causes such an affliction, a paralysis, a palsy?

But here is the paradox—Christ *first* forgave him. “Man, thy sins are forgiven thee.” (We must not believe that forgiveness before healing is always the sequential method of God. In John 9 the blind man is healed and then he believed on the Lord.) To this paralytic, after his sins were forgiven, Christ said, “Arise, and take up thy couch, and go into thine house.” It seems that this disease came upon him for some unique sin in his life, and that is why it was imperative for Christ to forgive him first, and then heal him. The people declared, “We have seen strange things today”—the healing, but also the forgiveness of sins. It is important to see people forgiven of sin but then healed from the side effects of those sins. And God can do it! Thank God, He can do it! But we need to be forgiven first, then let God take care of the side effects. People today want to

be forgiven, but they want the desire of sin to remain, including the side effects. The churches today are filled “spiritually” with souls handicapped, lame, and blind (Rev. 3:17:b). But God is able to do more for us than simply forgive us of our sins. The two may not happen simultaneously, but He forgives and He heals.

Conclusion

As a stranger in a strange land, we also left a church system as it became strange in a strange land. We are seeing strangers ruling in a strange land. Carnality is a strange land. And we are going to be witnessing some strange trials to come upon God’s people. When we hear of them, we must pour out our heart toward that individual. Some of God’s married couples may have children born to them with afflictions, severe afflictions. Some may think, “This is so sad,” or, “I am so sorry that your child was born this way.” Dear reader, this is not the way God’s people view these things. They do not view it as a blight. They do not view it as a negative from God. Sometimes the deeper the affliction, the greater the gift from God. We are praying for healing! That certainly would be a miracle to talk about. And we believe healing is in the Atonement. But God may desire, in some situations, to honor Himself by not healing while providing grace for the special gift of affliction.

God's motive in whatever He does is for Himself; we are second. It is to His glory. There are alternatives. What will bring Him the greater glory? Will it be the healing? Or will it be the proof that His grace is sufficient, and out of it, as the years unfold and the child grows older, we will find that God honored us with an example of a most comely gift. "Where is God in the matter?"

Take the time to look for God. What do we say in the prayers? How do we say it? What words do we say to God in the delicacy of these things? Only God knows the reason for it all, and I must trust Him. Sometimes you must tell parents, "Do you trust God with your child? Do you trust Him? Are you willing to take your hands off? Don't protect your child from God! Trust God with the child, and the circumstances of life." Our times and our child's times are in His hands! A woman who has lost a child in death no longer needs to struggle in prayer for him. The child is safe in heaven. The child did the will of God in the appointment of life in the womb of the mother. We must not think it strange. We dare not use the word *strange* for God. He is not a stranger. He doeth all things well, and He knows what He is doing. He knows the end from the beginning.

We may witness the final collapse of America in our lifetime before our death or before the Rapture, and we

may be absorbed in a situation that we never dreamed would take place. But think it not strange concerning the fiery trials, and when the paradoxes come seemingly filled with opposites, the way to save your life is to lose it. Losing your life is strange; it is paradoxical. God's strange ways work amidst a strange land. Job questioned God, but he did not have a Bible; we do! We have seen God work in the lives of the people recorded in the Scriptures. Jacob cried out, "All these things are against me" (Gen. 42:36), but we know from Romans 8:28, that this was not true.

May God help us as we witness what seems to be strangeness in the workings of God in the End Time of the last days, that we will continue to trust and believe, "He doeth all things well." **[5]**

Foundations Calendar

Spring Semester of the Foundations Schools 2019

**Beginning of Spring Semester
January 8**

**Annual Day of Prayer
February 21**

**Student Preaching Day
March 6**

**Annual Bible Conference
April 5-12**

**Commencement
May 10**

The New Age: The Last Church Age

(Reprint)

Dr. H. T. Spence

God has divinely appointed our lives to be lived in the most crucial hour of human history: the time of the coming of two men. First there is the coming of the God-Man, the Lord Jesus Christ for a Rapture of His people, and then there is the coming of the Antichrist. Two different groups of people in the earth are awaiting the arrival of these two men. There is a remnant that is looking for the coming of Christ in the darkest hour of history, the darkest spiritual hour of the Institutional Church. There is also the world that is looking for the coming of Antichrist to bring all of the world governments under one federation and to rid the world of the clutter of religion. The generation before and at the coming of Jesus Christ for His saints will see the battle against the world and the Christian apostasy at its hottest, the deception at its greatest, and the compromises of the Church at their most prolific in history. Likewise the generation before the coming of Antichrist will be most crucial in its preparation of the world for him.

The New Age Movement

The New Age movement and its great ideological conversation are boldly growing throughout the civilized world. To understand its present

intent, we must briefly view its accruing manipulative powers in history. In the early years of this movement (before the turn of the twentieth century), it was known as the New Consciousness movement. It was so named because it was a movement to literally alter the consciousness of its followers. Its intent was to bring a “new” understanding of the self in the light of global mindset. One of the prominent writings promoting this movement in the 1920s was Marilyn Ferguson’s *The Age of Aquarius*. In this book she explained the unfolding of such a movement for the future into what would ultimately be called the New Age movement. One of the critical characteristics of this movement is its bringing together of Eastern and Western thought. Eastern thought and religion has generally been formed upon mysticism and transcendentalism, while Western thought has generally been based upon linear logic. Buddhism, Hinduism, and other Eastern religious thought must be mixed with Western thinking in order to bring about a new global view of philosophy, epistemology, politics, government, music, art, and even religious thought including Christianity. To merge the East and West in thought will bring about a new view of existence or con-

sciousness concerning who we are and why we are here.

The New Age of the Institutional Church

Parallel to the world, there is also a “new age” movement within the institutional church. This new age view is demanding a new view and a new interpretation of Christianity. This new age movement within the Church began around the turn of the twentieth century, on the heels of the birth of Liberalism and Modernism.

When Liberalism erupted in Europe a number of characteristics identified it as an enemy to true Christianity: (1) the rejection of historic Christian doctrine; (2) the tolerance of all religious views; (3) the denial of the literal Word of God; (4) the denial of the deity of Christ and all the doctrinal aspects of the “God-Man”; (5) the broad acceptance of evolution; (6) the denial of any supernatural intervention of God with man; and (7) the birth of the Social Gospel and teaching that sin was a social issue. Historic Fundamentalism was born to confront this evil corruption of the Word of God.

There soon followed in Europe the birth of the “Neo” movement that ultimately has permeated the message of public Christianity bringing about the demise of the public proclamation of the true Gospel. This movement commenced with what was called “Neo-

Protestantism” or “Neo-Orthodoxy.” It stepped forward in the writings of Karl Barth initially as a reaction to Liberalism. Its cry was that “we need to get back to the Bible,” which sounded honorable on the surface. It declared, “The Bible *contains* the Word of God,” rather than that the Bible *is* the Word of God. While Neo-Orthodoxy took the position of the Liberals believing that the Bible was a collection of myths, sagas, and legends, it also believed that the Bible was man’s only hope. What was needed by modern man was a new method of interpretation in order to understand the Bible. Their new approach to interpretation embraced form criticism and existentialism. In their “new” view of Scriptures, the Bible becomes the Word of God only when it existentially moves you. This neo concept of theology also spoke of the “community of God,” teaching universalism in the understanding of salvation.

Because Neo-Orthodox men were situationalists in belief, another new theology was born called Neo-Morality. This new movement denounced all absolutes believing that “love” was the only absolute law of God. Part of its warp and woof was pragmatism and relativism. Neo-Morality destroyed all principles, dogmas, and absolutes of Scripture.

In the latter part of the 1940s the “new age” movement of the Church

mutated into Neo-Evangelicalism. This was a new version of Fundamentalism that denounced biblical separation. The twofold burden of Fundamentalism at this time was that “ye must be born again” and that “ye should earnestly contend for the Faith.” This next step in the Church new age movement wanted the former burden of evangelism without the latter burden of contending. Standing against the ecclesiastical separatist position of a separated life and a separated Gospel, they forwarded a more-accepted Christianity that avoided anything negative, that sought acceptance by the scholastic (especially Neo-orthodoxy ones), that despised dogmatism in doctrine and preaching, that showed greater concern for social issues, and that promoted an ecumenical spirit. In the March 1956 issue of *Christian Life* magazine, eight points were given concerning this new movement: (1) to have a friendly attitude towards secular science; (2) to have a willingness to reexamine the work of the Holy Spirit [that would eventually include the Charismatics]; (3) to have a more tolerant attitude toward varying views of eschatology; (4) to have an increased emphasis upon scholarship; (5) to have a more definite recognition of social responsibility; (6) to have a reopening of the subject of biblical inspiration; (7) to have a growing willingness of theologians to converse and dialogue with the Liberals; and

(8) to restructure preaching with (a) an overemphasis on the positive aspects while neglecting its warning aspects, (b) an occupation with psychology, (c) a replacement of authoritative pronouncement with the concept of “sharing ideas,” (d) a message that the people want rather than what they need, (d) a retreat from what is viewed as dogmatism, and (f) compromises in the Great Commission.

As the New Church Age continued to mutate, Neo-Orthodoxy destroyed the literality of Scriptures; Neo-Morality destroyed all absolutes; and Neo-Evangelicalism destroyed biblical separation.

In the same year that Neo-Evangelicalism was born (1948), Israel became a nation and the birth of the World Council of Churches was acknowledged. But there was another “neo” birth: it was Neo-Pentecostalism. A rising “healer” within the Pentecostal Holiness Church began to announce “audible voices from God” and declared that he had the power of healing in his right hand. He also promoted a new approach to Pentecost and to the Holy Spirit. His name was Oral Roberts. He finally left the Pentecostal denomination and joined the apostate United Methodist Church in 1968 as a result of their bailing him out of financial debt for Oral Roberts University.

Neo-Pentecostalism became the seed for the conception of the Charismatic

Movement in the late 1960s outside of the Pentecostal denominations. This movement had a profound effect on the Roman Catholic Church between 1968 and 1972, there, the term *Charismatic* becoming more identified with the “New Pentecost” in Rome. By 1972 *charismatic* became more and more a transdenominational term. Rome will call it a *renewal*. Since Roman Catholics believe their parishioners receive the Holy Spirit at Confirmation, the speaking in tongues is simply a renewing of that which they received at Confirmation.

By the end of the 1970s, nearly all of the Pentecostal denominations had become identified with the Charismatic movement. This error made the Holy Spirit greater than the Bible and open revelations from the Spirit co-equal in authority with the Scriptures. The messages of prosperity and health became their watchword rather than the message of Christ and a holy, spiritual life in Him. All of this new view of Christianity is part of the last Church age, the Laodicean Church Age dedicated to the “New Age” of the Church.

The New Church Age Music

As the ministry of church music has capitulated to Contemporary Christian Music, it has also contributed to the mood and spirit of this “new age” of the church age. In *Confronting Contemporary Christian Music*, I made the following observation:

Why do multitudes of people attend the Gospel sings heard all around our country today? Is it for the Word of God contained in the songs? The songs may contain Scripture itself, but the melodic wrapper is presented in such a way that it is not offensive to the world, and it truly comes across as entertaining rather than “churchy” or “preachy.”

We are being told that music is now the key to evangelism and that evangelism is the sole purpose of the church. But a church cannot build itself on evangelism; it must build upon the Word of God. If evangelism is the only fountain, the church will be a shallow, carnal church without the stability to meet the onslaught of this powerful age. If the preaching of the pulpit weakens, it will tolerate songs that are weak in melody and message (though the message may be true). If our songs are only evangelistic in nature, or their arrangements “easy-listening” in mood and spirit, they too give a cushioning effect to whatever truth the lyrics may contain. Ralph Carmichael wrote and arranged many such songs years ago containing very close harmony, marked with dissonance, producing a smooth and soft effect. It was a musical sedative to the soul. And it compelled the sword of the Word of God to be sheathed, leaving it impotent upon its hearers. Yes, music directors can make the Word of God impotent simply by the way they arrange a song,

the way they sing it, or even the way they accompany it. Once a less-than-the-best direction is set on a musical path in a church or movement, it is but a matter of time before the music will go "the way of all flesh."

Conclusion

We are truly in the "New Age of the Church" that is conforming more and more into the New Age of the political world. The Church hates anything that is antiquity. It has gone to new church buildings that are more and more modern in architectural structure with the sanctuary becoming more of an auditorium for entertainment. The acrylic lectern now has taken the place of the "offensive" pulpit of wood. Psychology has taken the place of old-fashioned preaching, and platitudes of oratorical speech for the natural man have taken the place of the strong preaching to the heart and conscience of a man. We are in the church age of the "new Jesus," the "new view" of God, the "new view" of salvation, which is rapidly leading the church to Universalism. This new age of the Church is pressing us to a new view of Roman Catholicism, calling us to repent of our former protesting against the Mother harlot Rome.

What the Bible calls "apostasy" or "the falling away," the institutional church is calling a "revival" or an "awakening." We are now reading of rising "Christian music" like BALM

(Born Again Lesbian Music) to which prominent men, such as Bill Gaither, have lent their stamp of approval. The powers of neutrality that now oppress many Christians who took a stand in the past, the powers of compromise which are becoming more and more open in evidence, and the powers of apostasy are all coming in like a flood into the churches of the world. They are getting ready to join hand in hand with all the other religions of the world to bring about the one World Church that will freely ride the back of the Beast, the Antichrist.

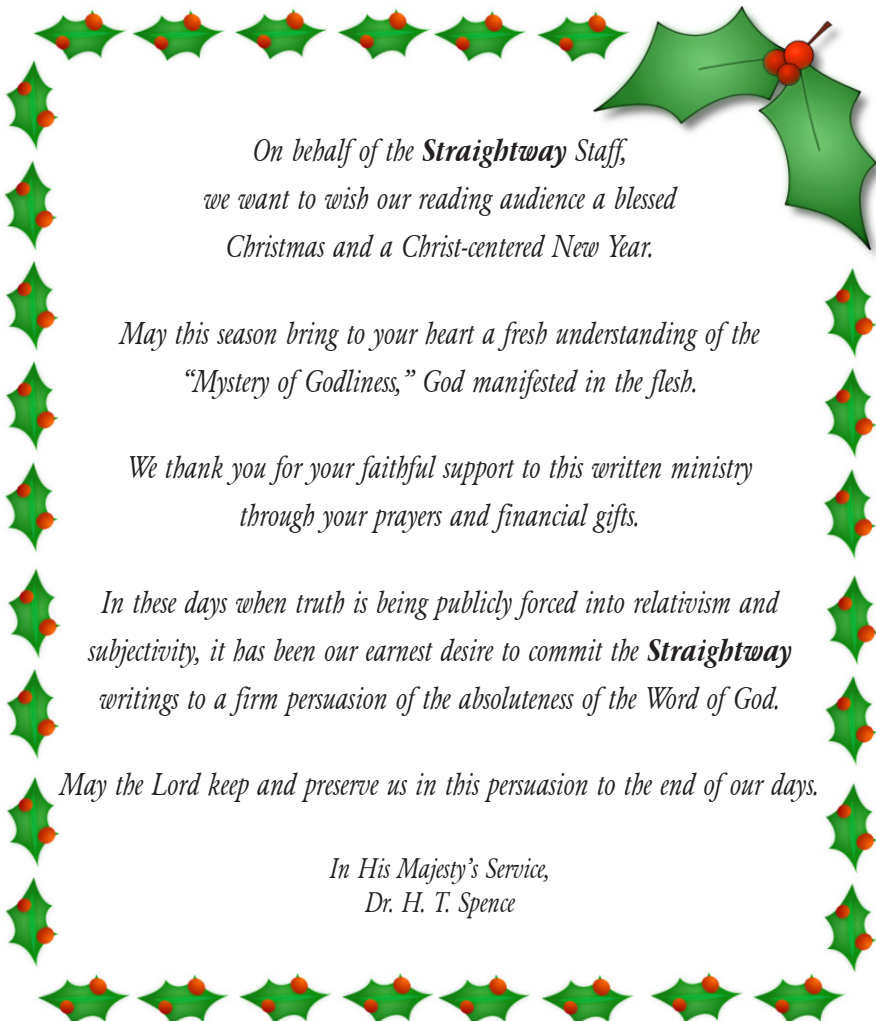
The true remnant is battling against this "new" way and the "new" view of God and His Son that will ultimately be separated from the Scriptures. The written Word of God and its dogmatism must go before the final "New" can permeate all aspects of the global church. We are now in the "Yea, hath God said" stage, when the evangelical world does not even agree on what is the text of the Word of God. Its view has become more nebulous and semantic. Most preachers are now Bible "critics" rather than Bible proclaimers.

There is nothing new that is true, and nothing that is true is new. The urgency of the hour is critical; we have no time to throw away that which has been tried and proved through the centuries by the greatest of saints. The new will wear off after a while, and the Church will find another "man of the

hour” with his unique “purpose-driven life” and his concept of the “prayer of Jabez.” The Institutional Church today is in a very fluid state, rising and falling with the tides of the popular. It is becoming as unstable as water, yet the people love to have it so.

May God keep us on the old and deliver us from the tantalizing influ-

ences of the “new.” This New Age may be in vogue with the populous mass of humanity, but it has no character of inner spirituality to stand before the God of Eternal Verity. We plead with the Remnant: keep on keeping on! Don’t waver with the mighty tides of change; they have no identification with the God of the Bible! **[S]**



*On behalf of the **Straightway** Staff,
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May the Lord keep and preserve us in this persuasion to the end of our days.

*In His Majesty’s Service,
Dr. H. T. Spence*

An Allegiance to Christ and the Scriptures Versus Theological Systems

(Reprint)

Dr. H. T. Spence

When Christ came to earth He came through the Jewish line. The Bible emphatically declares Him to be the seed of Abraham and from David's loins. His divine appointment by the Heavenly Father was that He would come to earth as a Jew and spend His life among the Jews of Palestine. He declared that salvation was of the Jew.

On rare occasions there were Gentiles with whom Jesus briefly associated: the Syrophenician woman, a Samaritan woman, and the Greeks who came to see Him. In John 10:16, He told the Jewish leaders, "And other sheep I have which are not of this fold: them also I must bring and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold and one shepherd." This was a most unusual statement: "other sheep I have," (in the present tense) though they had not come to know Him yet.

Who were these other sheep? These other sheep were the Gentiles. They were to be one with the Jews having one shepherd. Note the words of the apostle Paul in Ephesians 2:14-18:

For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments

contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; and that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: and came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.

Christ made of the two, Jew and Gentile, one new man. For in Christ neither Jew nor Greek, male or female, bond or free—it is one flock.

The Wine in Old Wineskins

There is a most important truth that Jesus gave in Luke 5 that must be carefully understood before we further our view of the Christ, the Scriptures, and theological systems.

And he spake also a parable unto them; no man putteth a piece of a new garment upon an old; if otherwise, then both the new maketh a rent, and the piece that was taken out of the new agreeth not with the old. And no man putteth new wine into old bottles; else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled, and the bottles shall perish. But new wine must be put into new bottles; and both are preserved. No man also having drunk old wine straightway desireth new: for he saith,

The old is better (vv. 36–39).

When Christ came preaching His doctrine, it was as new, fresh wine. The great danger with this new wine was to have it poured into old wine skins. In other words, Christ warned of the danger of taking His teaching and pouring it into the old wineskin of Judaism. It is important to declare that Christianity was not a renewing of Judaism; it was never to become a part of Judaism. Judaism was a religious system in apostasy; apostasy cannot be revived or renewed. Furthermore, Christianity was never to be a final form of Judaism. It was its own entity; therefore, it could not be poured into that which was old and apostate.

At the conclusion of this parable, Christ gave a sobering observation: *No man also having drunk old wine straightway desireth new: for he saith, the old is better.* Here, Jesus revealed that the tendency of man is not to want to leave an old system of thinking. The Jews had made a dedication to tradition, and it would be very problematic for them to change to another wine and even to another wineskin. The new wine in this context would be Christ.

Jesus' "one flock" concept to the Jew became difficult for them to "theologically" comprehend in the days of the early Church. The Jew thought that in order for a Gentile to come to know God he had to become a proselyte to

Judaism; Gentile ways of living would now have to become the ways of a Jew. For Gentile men the Jew required circumcision.

Since the Church began among Jewish believers, how would a person become a follower of Christ? Would he have to become a Jew first? Would he become a Christian by way of becoming a Jewish proselyte? In the Book of Acts it is evident that this was a hard adjustment to resolve for many of the Jewish brethren. There was this subtle, underlying belief that a Gentile conversion was somewhat inferior to that of a Jewish conversion. These brethren truly had a problem with Christ's "one flock" view of Jew and Gentile.

In Acts 6, we initially read of the friction between the Grecian widows (Jews living in a Gentile environment) and the Hebrew widows. Although these were Jewish widows, to an orthodox Jew even the taint of a Gentile concept affected the pure Jew. In Acts 10, God had to prepare Peter for the bringing of the full gospel to a Gentile named Cornelius. When God showed Peter the unclean animals and told him, "Rise, Peter; kill and eat," his response was "Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean." God responded, "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common" (10:15b). Clearly Peter had a problem with this matter of the Gentiles.

Later in Acts 11 when Peter returned to Jerusalem and gave a report about going to the Gentiles, “they that were of the circumcision contended with him, saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them” (11:2, 3). This rising theological system of Jewish circumcision appears again in Acts 15 within the Church: “Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved” (Act 15:1). The Judaizers were those who expounded this new system in Church history. These mixed the human Jewish thinking with revelation of Scripture. They had made their “human” system of salvation equal with the Scriptures.

How sad that a number of good men in the New Testament never were delivered from the old wine and the old wineskin! The failures continue even in the aftermath of the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15:

But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles; but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel [not the truth of the theological

system], I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? (Gal. 2:11–14)

Oh, the dissimulation of this theological system, and how it affected even some of the best men!

As late as Acts 21 when the apostle Paul (the only one fully delivered from the theological system of Judaism) came to Jerusalem in the aftermath of his third missionary journey, he confronted the system once again:

And when he had saluted them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry. And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe: and they are all zealous of the law” (21:19, 20).

Here, James, the half-brother of the Lord, was still caught in the old wineskin, endeavoring to pour the new wine of Christianity into the old wineskin of Judaism. He proclaimed that although Paul had given the gospel to Gentiles who had believed, the Jews who came to Christ were “all zealous of the law,” implying that they were more dedicated Christians. Yes, how sad that some never were delivered from their humanly-devised “theological system” by giving their allegiance fully unto Christ and the true gospel.

In John 17 Christ wanted all His disciples to be one; Christ desired this not only for those at that time but also those that would believe in the future (17:20, 21).

The Powers of Theological Systems in Church History

As the history of Christianity began to unfold, heresies continued to arise from which Scripture commanded men to separate. First there were the Judaizers and “disorderly brethren.” Later there was the fourth-century heresy of Arianism that denounced the deity of Christ. Athanasius, God’s man who stood in allegiance with the Scriptures and its Christ, pressed not only for the denunciation of Arius but also for his exile. In the aftermath of the Council of Nicea (a.d. 325), splintered groups began to rise up, some of the true remnant, others of great heresies. By the end of that century the great controversy between Pelagius and Augustine over the doctrine of man’s depravity arose.

The rise of Roman Catholic domination gave evidence to the power it universally held over people through their presentation of the doctrine of Christ and the Scriptures. The traditions of the Church fathers now held sway over what the Scriptures declared. Thus another system arose from religious man under the guise of “antiquity” or traditions which brought a binding to the true Christ and to the Scriptures.

The rise of the Protestant Reformation brought a biblical break with Rome through a formal protest against its heresies. Two great themes stood forth within the Reformation: (1) The preaching of Christ, and (2) the preaching of the Scriptures. The high pulpit now took the place of the high altar. Christ alone! Scriptures alone! From these two thematic declarations all other doctrinal beliefs for the Christian would flow.

These important doctrines included the precious doctrine of grace as a monergistic truth. The Reformation brought to reality the right of man to serve God and believe in Him according to the dictates of his conscience. Such a man, armed with the Word of God, could stand up against councils and popes. This was the cry of that liberating hour! Such liberation of conscience gave Luther the right to break with Rome; but it also gave Zwingli the right to break from Luther; it gave liberty of conscience to Carlstadt, John Calvin, and later Jacobus Arminius.

From one perspective the Reformation was the providential movement to break away from Rome allowing every individual to believe what he wanted to believe in the light of the Scriptures. At the same time, it also became a weapon in the hands of the Devil to divide the Body of Christ on earth into schisms and divisions. How does

a man handle such a liberty; how does he view it in the light of Christ's body? This new liberty brought the birth of myriads of Protestant and Reformation theological systems; such systems may be called "bodies of divinity."

Of all the major methods of studying theology, perhaps the most subjective is Dogmatic Theology. Dogmatic Theology is the study of theology from the perspective of men's councils, dogmas, and creeds. It is what *they* have come to believe that the Scriptures teach. Although Dogmatic Theology is a profitable study, we can never make its conclusion equal with Scripture. This is one of many reasons why we are against the theological system of Rome—*such a system believes that the men of the Church were infallible in their interpretation and that their collective writings are co-equal with Scripture*. When discrepancies between the Scripture and their system appeared, they embraced their system.

We must always remember that *all* theological systems were produced by men who were confronting *their* generation and were endeavoring to "work out their own salvation with fear and trembling," just as we all are endeavoring to do by God's help. Although the liberty of the conscience before God is a wonderful thing, we must be careful not to make "infallible" any human system of thought derived from this liberty.

One of the great deficits that has come from theological systems is the friction and division it has caused within the Body of Christ. According to the writing of Paul to the Corinthians, such friction and division are a great sign of carnality within the life of a man or within a church. At the outset of the first epistle of the apostle to the Corinthians he declares the following:

Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name. And I baptized also the household of Stephanas: besides, I know not whether I baptized any other. For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel; not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect (1:12-17).

Theological systems began very early in the minds of the people within the Church. Is it biblical to call ourselves after the name of a system of thought? Did Arminius die for us? Are we baptized in the name of Calvin? This is the sad commentary of fallen Christianity; we have succumbed to that which is inferior to the gospel of Christ and His gospel alone. It may be said that Paul called

it his gospel (Rom. 2:16), but it was so called because it was given to him by revelation and his writings were part of the Holy Scripture (2 Pet. 3:15, 16). This *cannot* be said of anyone since the Canon of the New Testament has been completed! To call oneself after a human name apart from Christ is going to that which is inferior and beneath the gospel of that Christ. Although some men may have been brilliant and contributed greatly to understanding truth, all are eclipsed when it comes to Christ. All other writings must sink into the shadows when it comes to the Scriptures. Our term *Fundamentalist* is not a man's name; it is a term that calls us back to the Scriptures.

Conclusion

Men have always grappled over the paradoxes of the Scriptures—the two seemingly opposites molded into one principle that bring about the balance of both truths. Luther spoke of “justification by faith” in the understanding that the Lamb's blood must be applied, while Calvin's viewpoint of sovereignty placed the emphasis upon the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. The Bible clarifies both truths: In Exodus 12, not only must the Lamb be slain but also its blood must be applied in faith upon the door (Heb. 11:28 protects this part of the paradox). Calvin might emphasize in Acts 27:22, 25: “For there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but

of the ship. . . . Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me.” In contrast, Arminius will press 27:31, “Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved.”

Sadly, the systems have warred to divide the paradox by taking one side or the other and thus destroying the Bible's teaching. This is the sad reality of many controversies in Church history where a paradoxical truth was grappled with; often to prove one point, one was pressured to choose “either/or.” Confessions were born from the hearts of men and followed by modifications; this is true with Calvin's many revisions of his youthful writing *The Institutes* (at age 26) presented to the King of France in behalf of the Huguenots. Some will take one revision; others give their allegiance to another revision. As history unfolds, each generation gives their confession with modification. Today, some will even declare that Calvin's work is the greatest embodiment of truth “compiled by man,” while others will go so far as to project it as synonymous with the gospel.

Perhaps it is true that every man “probably” by the end of his life will have a system, either one he has forged himself or embraced from someone else's. Sad to say, what were once *distinctives* of the system began to be tightly woven into the *fundamentals* of

the Word of God—some good, some bad.

However, the greater tragedy is the divisions created within the Body of Christ. Will the decrees of God receive the glory for saving us? Or will the death and merit of our blessed Lord receive the glory for saving us? Will the cry in heaven be, “Worthy are the Decrees!” or “Worthy is the Lamb!” (Rev. 5)? Not even the decrees of God can compete with the Son of God in His intrinsic glory and merit of procuring our salvation. Are the Scriptures greater than the system? Will the theological systems be the composite of my preaching, or will the gospel of the Scriptures? Where does my ultimate allegiance lie? Does the Body of Christ cease within a system’s boundaries? Does the Body of Christ extend beyond the human boundaries of theological systems?

There is only *one Good Shepherd* Who gave His life for His sheep; there is only *one flock*, and only *one Body*. Although we must remember that the Reformation brought us freedom and liberty from Romanism, it also opened the door to individualistic interpretation of the Scriptures. Therefore, Liberalism and Modernism also became systems of theological thought in Protestantism. Will the evolving of systems ever cease? Is it three points, four points, five points, seven points of Calvinism? Do any two Calvinists

agree on every point? Do any two Arminians? Must a person be only either Calvinist or Arminian?

If you destroy the paradoxes of Scripture, the hypostatic unions, you destroy truth. For truth is always balanced. We now have come to a time in the conservative camp that sides are rallying their forces; every man is being forced to choose one system or the other, believing there is no other existing camp. Nevertheless, before the founders of these systems lived, there was the gospel and it was the gospel that saved men’s souls. When we get to heaven there will be no man found worthy to open the book sealed with seven seals. No, not Paul, not John, not the Virgin Mary, and not even Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, Arminius, Huss, or beloved Wycliff. No, our only allegiance will be to the One Who died for us, Who redeemed us, in whose Name we were baptized spiritually, and the One for Whom we will live giving glory and honor for ever and ever—the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no power in the systems, for they are all human. But thank God, there is power in Christ and His Scriptures. The Scriptures are not a system but a full declaration of Truth given by God Himself. This is where my allegiance should lie! §

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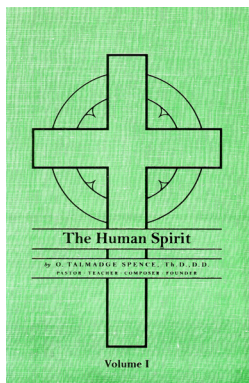
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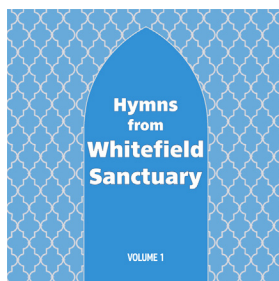
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