



The Reflector

Published monthly in the interest of calling people back to the Bible
Edited by Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

October 2007

A Renewed Effort

Editorial

For sometime we have been thinking about resurrecting “The Reflector” or publishing a similar paper. A number of people who were on our mailing list when we edited the “The Reflector” as a bulletin of the Fultondale (Alabama) church of Christ from August 1970 until the end of 1991, have told us that they would like to see us publish such a paper again. Up until now, we have not attempted to do it because of the cost and logistics of publication and distribution. Since we do not have the financial resources needed to publish a hard copy version, which we would prefer, we decided to go with the second best by taking advantage of the wide spread use of the internet and bring it back as an electronic publication.

“The Reflector” is far from a unique name. Just a quick google search will bring up multitudes of newspapers, church and college publications using it as a title. Because of this we considered giving this new effort a more unique name. But since many still remember our efforts in the old bulletin and since the name, “The Reflector,” is obviously not the exclusive property of anyone, we have decided to go ahead and call the new publication by the same name.

Why are we embarking on this effort? We are not under any delusion that what we might say or write will have any great impact on the church either present or future. So, we are not undertaking this renewed effort with the notion that brethren cannot afford to be without our writings. We just hope that we can help to remind our brothers and sisters in the Lord that the Bible and it alone has the answers to our many “brotherhood” and local problems. We have been trying to do this all of our preaching life and as we grow ever more closely to the end of our earthly pilgrimage we feel an even greater urgency to be doing this as long as we are “in this tabernacle.”

Since 1991 when we ceased publication of the old Reflector, several issues have been added to the list of issues that were already bothering those who profess to be following the New Testament pattern. These issues need to be

addressed.

Over the past several years much of the preaching coming from our pulpits both in weekly services and gospel meetings leaves a lot to be desired – not so much in style as in substance. Rather than “reason(ing) with them from the Scriptures” (Acts 17:2), and challenging the hearers to look at the scriptures with them, too many sermons(?) are filled with pop psychology, quotations from denominational writers, cheer leader type hype, and emotional manipulation. We want to encourage any that we can to reverse this trend and get back to Paul’s charge to Timothy – “preach the **word.**”

We want to do all we can to encourage young men coming along who desire to preach to examine themselves as to why they want to preach. Is it because they want a “professional career” or is it because they have a

burning desire to point lost souls to salvation and to build the saved up in the faith? If the later, they need to realize that only the gospel that the Apostles preached can save souls (Rom. 1:16; Gal. 1:8,9) and that only the “word of his grace ... is able to build” the saved up and “give (them) an inheritance among them which are sanctified.” (Acts 20:32). Presenting lessons that will accomplish this will require men who are willing to spend much time in study and preparation of the kind of lessons that will help accomplish these goals. If they can get brethren to financially support them as they do this, well and good, if not they will still do it as time and opportunity will allow them. We hope that we can use this medium to encourage young men to think more along these lines.

There are some brethren closer to our age that we feel may be suffering from “battle fatigue” and have all but thrown in the towel and decided that the best way to go is to ignore controversial matters or at least push them to the back burner and spend most, if not all, their efforts in making brethren feel good about themselves. We hope that we can somehow in some small way rekindle the militant fire that was once

Inside:

What about Romans 14?	Page 2
Correcting the Evil World	Page 3
Is Your Faith Based on Evidence?	Page 4

within these brethren.

Lest someone get the idea that we should have named this new publication “The War Bonnet,” we want to make it clear that we recognize that we cannot be built up by just fighting the wrongs among us, but that we must balance that with positive material from the scriptures. We hope to do both.

We are not like one of whom it was said that “if he could find any material that he thought better than his own, he would publish it in his paper.” We will welcome short articles from brethren on about any religious subject – even those with whom we do not agree. We will likely publish a reply to that with which we disagree. We still believe that truth has nothing to fear from investigation. We are not interested in “wrangling” with anyone, but we are interested in contending for the faith. That we will do to the best of our ability. Of

course, we reserve the right to decline publishing anything that we feel is not in keeping with the size and purpose of this small publication or is not in the best interest of furthering the truth.

For all the above reasons, we launch this renewed effort with fear and trembling and with the belief that most brethren want to do what is right and will do the right thing when it is pointed out to them from the scriptures.

We are using the PDF format because of the ease with which it can be formatted as close to “The Reflector” of old as possible. It will be easy to retrieve it from our website and print it out as a four page document and pass it on to anyone that our readers think it would benefit.

Pray for us.

What about Romans 14?

Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

In my judgment, much of the recent discussion over Romans 14 misses the mark. I have difficulty categorically affirming that the application of this chapter does not include anything in “the faith.” The very first verse tells how to deal with one weak “in **the** faith” — the same expression in Greek and English as in Acts 6:7; 13:6; 14:12; 16:5, etc., where it is clear that “the faith” refers to the system of faith – the New Testament gospel system. While this chapter does deal with matters that pertain to “the faith” (v. 1) – it deals with those matters of “the faith” that govern a Christian’s *personal* conduct before God.

The chapter is not dealing with moral matters – questions of what is morally right or wrong? God’s moral code, though incorporated into both “the law” and “the faith,” antedates both systems all the way back to the beginning of God’s dealing with man. The things in this timeless moral code are things that Paul would refer to as being right (“clean”) or wrong “unclean of (themselves)” (v. 14) – things that man has been taught from the beginning of time. Things that man is without excuse for forgetting (cf. Rom. 1:18ff)

Consequently, I have a problem with making this chapter cover moral matters – though immorality is mostly an individual matter. It simply does not deal with lying, stealing, adultery, licentiousness, fornication, homosexuality, drunkenness and the like. One will have to look elsewhere to find out what to do about such matters. There are specific instructions dealing with having fellowship with those guilty of such matters. (Cor. 5). Furthermore, there is specific instructions about having fellowship with one who teaches another to commit fornication or puts a stumbling block that results in another committing fornication (Rev. 2:14, 20). If one in our midst is found guilty of such, after a reasonable time for repentance (the Lord even gave Jezebel time) such

a person must be purged for his own good and the good of the church.

Since the marriage, divorce, and remarriage question involves adultery and fornication it does not belong in this chapter. Marriage is part and partial of God’s moral code that goes all the way back to beginning of time. Marriage is God’s alternative to fornication (Heb. 13:4; 1 Cor. 7).

The things under consideration in Romans 14 are matters of personal conduct taught in “the faith” – “the faith” delivered to the saints (Jude 3). Those weak in the faith are parallel to those weak in knowledge in 1 Corinthians 8. Their knowledge and discernment under the faith had not yet developed to the point of the strong. The strong are required to bear with them in their weakness. The weak should not be allowed to judge (condemn) the strong. Each should allow the other to practice what he believes “the faith” requires of him in an atmosphere of *peace, patience* and *learning* – an atmosphere conducive to growing in the faith. As long as each has “it to himself before God” (v. 22), that is to say he does not make it a condition of “receiving” (v. 1) the other, they can still work together in those things that they must do in common (congregational matters).

To “*have it to himself*” is not the same as to “*keep it to yourself*.” One may, yea, must teach what he believes to be the truth on any subject even in matters of personal conduct. Paul clearly taught what he believed “the faith” teaches about eating meats — “I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself.” (v. 14). Paul did not violate his own instructions to “have it to yourself before God.” He taught what he believed “the faith” revealed on the subject. However, he realized that some were not yet convinced (they were weak in the faith). He could still show deference to them and let them practice their weak faith (and

not violate their consciences) while helping them grow unto the knowledge of “the faith” that he had. Each needed to watch his attitude toward and treatment of the other because each would stand before God in judgment (v. 10).

This chapter is not dealing in things fundamental to the faith – the “first principles of the doctrine of Christ.” Those addressed were “in the faith” – though some were weak in it. To be in the faith they would have had to believe and obey the first principles of the gospel. So, it is not talking about working together while holding to different doctrines involving those fundamental matters.

This chapter is not dealing with questions of congregational practice. There is not one thing in the chapter that deals with what Christians are do together as a church before God. Everything in the chapter deals with *personal* conduct. In such matters of personal (and morally right) conduct there can be “unity in diversity” – which is a far cry from the “unity in diversity” advocated by some brethren. This is why brethren for years have been able to work together while holding various views on subjects of individual application. But when it comes to matters of corrupting congregational worship and work there can be no

“unity in diversity.” When the instrument was introduced into congregational worship division came because it forced those who opposed it to sing with it or not sing – in either case it would violate their consciences, so they had to worship separately and mark those who brought it in as “those who cause divisions.” (Rom. 16:17). When missionary, benevolent, academic and other human societies were forced into church budgets, member had to either not give as commanded (1 Cor. 16:2) or contribute (have fellowship with) to that which they could not conscientiously support, so they likewise were forced to separate themselves so they could give in good conscience.

Again, we emphasize, Romans 14 does not cover matters of “the faith” that apply to congregational activity, but those matters (right within themselves) that apply to individual personal practices where Christians may differ while they grow together “till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a full grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:” (Eph. 4:13 American Standard Version).

Correcting The Evil World

Joe Fitch

It is easy to pick up preaching themes from the world news. There is much that is shocking – and shockingly wrong. We get caught up with evaluating the world – correcting the world – fixing its ills – reforming society. Actually, little needs to be said about the character of the world. It is evil – always has been.

Preaching like the first century? Which apostle preached about corruption in the Roman government? Where is the New Testament’s expose of the decadent, cruel, and insane policies of Caesar – or Herod – or Agrippa? Who led a crusade for justice and fairness in the Roman government? Who demanded liberty? Who opposed the oppressive taxes? Christians, small and great, were noticeably absent from all attempts to revamp society or to restructure nations.

There were no sermons defining how to vote– of course, there was no vote. No one even demanded the right to vote. Democracy was not interwoven into first century Christianity. No patriotic sermons. No Christian led revolts against the system because of its evil. They understood being in the world but not of the world (John 17:14).

Yet, we feel compelled to fix the world where we live – without any biblical principle or precedent. Quit the nonsense! Abandon the impossible task! You will not change the evil world.

What Shall We Do?

Submit as a citizen -- “Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities” (Romans 13:1). God expects it – even when rulers are far from good. “For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves” (Romans 12:1). Rebellious against government may be appealing, but it is not a recommendation to God. You must obey– not only to avoid civil punishment, but also for “conscience sake” (v.5).

Exercise your rights as a citizen. Paul did –occasionally. “Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman, and uncondemned?” (Act.27:25). “For if I am an offender, or have committed anything deserving of death, I do not object to dying; but if there is nothing in these things of which these men accuse me, no one can deliver me to them. I appeal to Caesar” (Acts 25:11). Paul was a Roman citizen, but it was not his obsession. He was much more concerned with his heavenly citizenship. “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body,...” (Philippians 3:20). As a citizen, seek the protection of law, enjoy liberty,

vote as you are allowed. You may even complain a little. It is allowed, but lead no crusade about it.

Work with people. What can you do—effectively? You can often effect change in an evil person. Convict them with the word of God. Show them sin in all its ugliness. Let them see the judge—and the fearful and eternal judgment upon sinners. Repentance—a change of life’s direction—may result. For centuries, Christians have been doing that—and dramatically changing lives.

Report the good news of redemption for sinners—even the worst of sinners. Show them the great mercy of the Lord of heaven. Let them envision a new and grand life open before them—with heaven’s gates open at the end. This news will be all the more precious after they realize what it means to be lost. For them, be sure to answer the question: “What must I do to be saved?”

Report the good news of God’s power to transform the character of men. Those who were once “conformed to this world” -- pressed into the world’s mold— can be fully

“transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2). That transformation is exactly what God seeks in man. That transformation demonstrates “what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” It is possible to be a new man! – a completely different man! It is possible to be transformed into the very spiritual image of Jesus. “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Corinthians 3:18).

The world is an impossible challenge to correct, reform, or materially influence. Jesus came and went back to heaven; the evil world was little different. Christianity in its height – its most powerful and influential stage – did not change the character of the evil world. And yet from Jesus until now, men have been changed – one by one. Forget reforming the evil world! Do something worthwhile. Be an Andrew; bring a lost soul to Jesus.

-via *Bible Comment*, Coppell, TX and *Gospel Power*, Anderson, AL

Is Your Faith Based on Evidence?

Stephen Russell

In the minds of so many today religion is something that is good for the mental well-being of an individual. It has *been relegated to being* little more than a fairy tale that makes people feel good. That’s okay if it *makes you feel good then* go ahead and believe in that, some will say in a condescending tone. Can your faith stand this ridicule? The answer for many has been a disappointing no as they have given in on questions of the Creation or the deity of Jesus Christ. How do *you view your faith? Is it something* you have because it makes *you* feel good or is it something you have developed as a result of learning truth that leads to reasonable conclusions? Hopefully it is the latter.

How do we ground ourselves in *the faith? So then faith cometh* by hearing and hearing by the word of God (Rom. 10:17). It is through intensive study of God’s word that we come to know more assuredly the truth of God and His Son. This should be the primary focus of anyone seeking more confidence in the *Word*. Read the Word.

What about scientists, historians, and the like? It should be any Christian’s assertion that the Bible *is true in every field it addresses*. Whether science, history, hygiene, etc. it is always accurate. With that *in mind* we should not *fear to* address any question from any one of these fields. I do not believe we need PhDs or years of research in all of these areas to discuss them. Nor do I believe that we need extensive knowledge in these areas to have a properly grounded faith. But *if you are going to get into a discussion* don’t be afraid to do a little research. Don’t be afraid that science

will refute your faith. If your faith has been grounded as it should be then you will approach any subject knowing that the truth is on God’s side and therefore you will find the *truth in these areas*. The evidence in these fields to support God is overwhelming.

We do not need to concede that we cannot prove our faith. We do not need to think that we believe in something as ill supportable as the idea that the earth is flat. Our faith is based on evidence. Our faith can be proved. We are rational people drawing rational conclusions. What is the alternative? It is a very prevalent alternative which says, I don’t care about facts, my faith is in my heart. God has never expected faith without evidence. John says of his writings, but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name. (Jn. 20:31). Evidence is given; a verdict is demanded.

In conclusion, let me offer a word of caution. If you are tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, then you need to take extreme care (cf. Eph. 4:14). This type of person is not the type of person who is established in the doctrine inside of the Word much less the premise of whether it is even from God. This person needs to establish himself with the ability to come to a firm conclusion and hold with conviction. And that doesn’t matter whether he is talking to a brother in Christ or an atheist. Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the **evidence** of things not seen. (Heb. 11:1)