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The Better Part of Wisdom

The articles I have written for publication in *The Voice of Elijah* newsletter over the past four years have ranged far and wide, covering a broad spectrum of topics. For those who have been reading along since the first issue, that excursion may have seemed a bit of a vagary. That is not exactly the case. I have been systematically putting together arguments in support of my contention that

the Church today is far from being what God intended because the Early Church lost *The Apostolic Teaching*.

Over the past two years, however, my task has become somewhat more complicated because I have been providing information to readers on three different levels. First, there is the information in the articles I write for those who subscribe to *The Voice of Eli-*

jah newsletter. Second, I make additional information available in the articles I write for distribution to the Monthly Contributors in *The Voice of Elijah Update*. Third, I provide monthly audio tapes to those who have joined The Next Step program.

The articles published in *The Voice of Elijah* newsletter are supposed to fill in gaps between things I have explained in the books I have written and the things I have explained on the other two levels. For the most part, they have treated Church history after A.D. 200. By contrast, the articles in *The Voice of Elijah Update* deal with Church history and Christian literature prior to A.D. 200. The Next Step tapes contain an even more comprehensive explanation of how the things I teach fit together in a coherent whole.

The challenge I have faced over the last two years lies in coordinating the material presented in the articles in *The Voice of Elijah* newsletter so that it is meaningful to readers on all three levels. I have not always been successful. However, it occurred to me recently that was probably because I had not focused on providing information for those on the third level while tailoring the presentation of the material for readers on the other two levels. I will try to do that in the future as much as I possibly can.

In the April 1994 issue I included an article that supplied background information for things I was planning to present to The Next Step participants. (See "Some People Will Make Light of Anything," *The Voice of Elijah*, April

HISTORY AND CHRISTIAN ORTHODOXY

How the West Became "Christian": Constantine and the Church

Shortly after the turn of the fourth century, radical changes—both political and religious—set the course for the future development of the "Christian West." Various individuals brought about those changes, but none so much as the Roman Emperor "Constantine the Great." Secular historians readily recognize Constantine's shrewdness and adeptness in political opportunism. Christian historians debate the nature of his influence on the Church.

One can gain a basic understanding of Constantine's character from a survey of the historical events that led up to his gaining control of the western half of the Roman Empire in A.D. 312 and his issuing of the "Edict of Milan" in A.D. 313. I will only summarize those events here. Those who desire to explore the subject further may consult the bibliography of sources listed at the end of this article. The complete account reads like an epic novel, with intrigue and subterfuge at every turn. Clearly, only the consummate politician could have successfully navigated such treacherous political seas.

In seeking insight into Constantine's "Christianizing" of the Roman Empire, it is also helpful to understand developments within the Christian Church during the last half of the third century. When Emperor Gallienus issued the Edict of Toleration in A.D. 261, he brought to an end a decade which included persecutions initiated by Decius and Valerian. The Church then experienced over 40 years of peaceful growth and prosperity. During that time, a huge influx of "Christian"

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Letters to the Editor

Lots of changes have occurred here in the last three months. In June, Ken Brooks took over as President and Executive Editor of *The Voice of Elijah*. Ken has been supporting this ministry in various ways since its beginning. He succeeds Mike Clay who is now working directly with The Elijah Project. God willing, this will free up more of Larry Harper's time, allowing him to concentrate on writing. We have also directed resources away from the intensive direct mail campaigns of the first half of this year and towards providing you, our subscribers, with more of the information you have been requesting. We have already begun to see the results. The Elijah Project recently published the final draft of *The Mystery of Scripture, Volume 1* which we sent out immediately to those who have been waiting patiently for its publication. The final, perfect bound version of the book should follow shortly. But The Elijah Project didn't want to keep everyone waiting while the manuscript undergoes a final edit, creation of an index, etc. As you read the first volume I am sure you will find the wait has been well worth it.

Those of you who are new subscribers may not realize a lot of people have been waiting as long as two and a half years for this book. Originally, *The Mystery of Scripture* was going to be a short, 50–70 page booklet slated for publication in January 1991. It soon became obvious, however, that to coherently present the evidence available, the publication was going to have to be much larger. Today, with the first volume almost completed, we are looking at a four volume set of 250–300 pages per volume. If you are seeking to understand the Old Testament, you really should read *The Mystery of Scripture, Volume 1*. You can use the Order Form at the back of this issue to order a copy. We are sending the final draft for now. You will receive a final, perfect bound copy in a few months. Once *The Mystery of Scripture, Volume 1* is complete, The Elijah Project plans to begin focusing on some of the other projects that have been put on the back burner due to lack of time and funds. The list includes Larry Harper's testimony, *God Called, I Answered*; a topical index for *The Voice of Elijah* newsletter; and, of course, the video project, which is now well underway. All of these projects are a long way from completion, but by refocusing our efforts, we hope to bring at least some of these to you over the next year.

Speaking of new publications, we have had an extremely positive response to *The Way, The Truth, The Life*, the eight-tape seminar series. It is encouraging to hear that you are benefiting from this series. We were convinced of its value from the start and are glad you feel the same. It is by far the most complete source we have to offer anyone who wants to know what we believe. One reader wrote:

This [The Way, The Truth, The Life] is an excellent series of tapes. Thanks for all the work you've put into making this such a great source of information.
Allen F., Kechi, KS

You're welcome.
Yours in Him,

Wisdom

From Page 1

1994.) I have since covered that information in The Next Step tapes, so I want to follow it up with this article. Nonetheless, the things presented here should be informative to readers at all three levels.

If Wisdom Were a Woman

In Proverbs 7–9, Solomon *parabolically* contrasts the Harlot woman described in Isaiah 47, Zephaniah 2–3 and Revelation 14–18 (among others) with *Wisdom*, which he also depicts *parabolically* as a woman. The Prophets, especially Isaiah, took up the *parabolic imagery* concerning the women they found mentioned in Proverbs and further developed it into a message concerning the fate of two cities—Babylon and Jerusalem.

The Apostle Paul also picked up the *parabolic image* of the two women mentioned in Proverbs, but he put a slightly different twist on it in his letter to the Galatians:

Tell me, you who want to be under law, do you not listen to the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the bondwoman and one by the free woman. But the son by the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and the son by the free woman through the promise. This is allegorically speaking: for these {women} are two covenants, one {proceeding} from Mount Sinai bearing children who are to be slaves; she is Hagar. Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother. For it is written,

“The Prophets, especially Isaiah, took up the parabolic imagery concerning the women they found mentioned in Proverbs and further developed it into a message concerning the fate of two cities—Babylon and Jerusalem.”

*“REJOICE, BARREN WOMAN WHO DOES NOT BEAR;
BREAK FORTH AND SHOUT, YOU WHO ARE NOT IN LABOR;
FOR MORE ARE THE CHILDREN OF THE DESOLATE
THAN OF THE ONE WHO HAS A HUSBAND.”*

And you brethren, like Isaac, are children of promise. But as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him {who was born} according to the Spirit, so it is now also. But what does the Scripture say?

“CAST OUT THE BONDWOMAN AND HER SON,

FOR THE SON OF THE BONDWOMAN SHALL NOT BE AN HEIR WITH THE SON OF THE FREE WOMAN.”

So then, brethren, we are not children of a bondwoman, but of the free woman. (Galatians 4:21–31)

Paul sees Sarah and Hagar as respectively representing the heavenly Jerusalem and the earthly Jerusalem. He doesn't tell us he got his information from what the Prophets wrote concerning Babylon and Jerusalem. Yet, because the point of his discussion is *inheritance*, and because he quotes Isaiah 54 in verse 27, it is obvious the basis for what he says lies in the *parabolic image* of levirate marriage as it is used by the Prophets.

Paul is elaborating on what the Prophets, especially Isaiah, said concerning Israel's *inheritance of the promise*. Isaiah repeatedly depicts God as the *Levir*—that is, as the “Redeemer”—Who will “build a house” for the deceased Son of God through the woman, *Wisdom*. That is why Paul *talks about* the Believer as an *heir* born of that woman, the heavenly Jerusalem.

The specific purpose of levirate marriage was to provide an *heir* for a deceased Israelite. Paul knew that. He

“Paul sees Sarah and Hagar as respectively representing the heavenly Jerusalem and the earthly Jerusalem.”

brought up the issue of the two covenants, however, because he also knew the Pharisees' distortion of *The Teaching of Moses* will lead to the appearance of Satan as the Antichrist in response to the messianic expectations of the Jews in our own time. (See “That's Why He's Called AntiChrist!” *The Voice of Elijah*, April 1992.)

I don't want to go into the intricate details of the *parabolic* message of the Prophets here. I will do that, in the short term, in The Next Step program, and I will eventually record everything for all to read in the three remaining volumes of The Resurrection Theology Series. For now, I merely want to point out what Jesus Christ and the Apostles have said concerning *Wisdom*, the woman through Whom the Prophets promised God would “raise up a seed” for the Messiah of Israel, Jesus Christ, after He died without a “name.” The one who has ears to hear will hear.

Jesus referred specifically to *Wisdom* as a woman on at least one occasion. In so doing, He first mentioned the fact that John the Baptist was the greatest of all those “born of women.” He then affirmed that the least in the Kingdom of God is greater than John, and concluded with a reference to the woman *Wisdom*:

“I say to you, among those born of women, there is no one greater than John; yet he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.” And when all the people and the tax-gatherers heard {this}, they acknowledged God's justice, having been baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected God's purpose for themselves, not having been baptized by John. “To what then shall I compare the men of this generation, and what are they like? They are like children who sit in the market place and call to one another; and they

“The hidden message of the Scriptures ... speaks in terms of two women. Both women are widows, and both have been left without a ‘name’—that is, a male heir. Each one needs a ‘redeemer’ to ‘build her house.’”

say, ‘We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not weep.’ For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine; and you say, ‘He has a demon!’ The Son of Man has come eating and drinking; and you say, ‘Behold, a gluttonous man, and a drunkard, a friend of tax-gatherers and sinners!’ **Yet wisdom is vindicated by all her children.**”
(Luke 7:28–35)

The point of what Jesus said is clear only to the one who understands that *parabolically* everyone who has been born again has been born as an **heir** of God through the woman *Wisdom*. The *parabolic image* of *Wisdom* as a woman merely explains that the only way one can enter the Kingdom of God is to be “born again” of an “imperishable seed” (1 Pet. 1:23). That “seed” is the *Wisdom of God* embodied in the *Living Word of God*.

You can see, therefore, that Jesus has said everyone “born” of the woman *Wisdom* is “greater than John” because John never had opportunity to be born again. He was beheaded before Jesus Christ was resurrected (Matt. 14:10). So he was never anything more than the greatest “among those born of women.”

On another occasion, Jesus again spoke *parabolically* in terms of *Wisdom* as a person, yet He did not at that time elaborate on the role *Wisdom* plays in “engendering” children for God. He did, however, allude to it by mentioning “the key of knowledge”:

And one of the lawyers said to Him in reply, “Teacher, when You say this, You insult us too.” But He said, “Woe to you lawyers as well! For you weigh men down with burdens hard to bear, while you yourselves will not even touch the burdens with one of your fingers. Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets, and {it was} your fathers {who} killed them. Consequently, you are witnesses and approve the deeds of

your fathers; because it was they who killed them, and you build {their tombs}. For this reason also the wisdom of God said, ‘I will send to them prophets and apostles, and {some} of them they will kill and {some} they will persecute, in order that the blood of all the prophets, shed since the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the house {of God}; yes, I tell you, it shall be charged against this generation.’ Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge; you did not enter in yourselves, and those who were entering in you hindered.”
(Luke 11:45–52)

“Everyone ‘born’ of the woman Wisdom is ‘greater than John’ because John never had opportunity to be born again.”

In this passage, Jesus is *talking about* the fact that God chose to “cut off from” Israel all the Jews living in His day. (I have explained the *meaning and significance* of that idiom in *Not All Israel Is Israel*.) However, His mention of the *Wisdom of God* as a person brings to His mind the fact that the woman *Wisdom* holds the seven “keys of the kingdom”—that is, the seven distinct messages hidden in the Scriptures.

That is why Jesus assails the lawyers for having “taken away the key of knowledge.” He knew they were teaching lies as though they were the Truth. They were thereby hindering those who otherwise might have been willing to “enter” the kingdom. (The wise will un-

derstand.) In that respect, His generation is no different than our own. Nobody today thinks anything at all of teaching others some novel concept they have concocted as though it were the Truth. They also fail to realize that if everybody is doing that, nobody actually has access to the Truth.

In normal times, continued speculation concerning the Truth would be the only avenue open to True Believers. But with the End of the Age swiftly approaching, as many Christians readily agree it is, these are not normal times. One will need to understand the Truth hidden in the Hebrew Scriptures in order to see through the delusion of the Antichrist. Therefore, you can believe what I teach if you care to, you can disbelieve it if you dare to. What you do with it is of no great concern to me. Those who are “children of *Wisdom*” will listen and, as Jesus said, “*Wisdom* will be vindicated by all her children.”

You see, just as Paul explained in Galatians 4, the *Living Word of God*—that is, the hidden message of the Scriptures—speaks in terms of two women. Both women are widows, and both have been left without a “name”—that is, a male **heir**. Each one needs a “redeemer” to “build her house.” One of those women is the woman mentioned in Proverbs 7–9. She is the woman *Wisdom*. The other is the *Harlot* woman mentioned in that passage and in Revelation 14–18.

However, Proverbs 9:1 tells you *Wisdom* has, in the *Wisdom of God* (no pun intended), already “built her house.” She did that for all time through the death and resurrection of the true Messiah of Israel, Jesus Christ. If we speak in terms of the *parabolic imagery* of the Prophets, however, her “house” is yet to be “built.” That will happen at the resurrection of the righteous, when all the children of *Wisdom* will be resurrected “in Christ.”

Don’t be deceived. The *Harlot* woman mentioned in Revelation 14–18 will soon seek out a “redeemer” to “build” her “house.” She will do that

“Jesus plainly said those who know the Truth here at the End will be hated by all who desperately want to believe the lies on which Satan is seeking to ‘build his house.’”

when Satan appears in the person of the Antichrist—the false messiah of the Jews. That fool will be along shortly. But don’t be overly concerned. As Jesus explained in the parable of the Wise Man and the Fool (Matt. 7:24–27), the “house” that Satan “builds” will collapse in ruin when Jesus Christ comes riding on the clouds (Luke 21:27) that bring the “rain.”

In the meantime, those who are children of the *Harlot* will show themselves to be fools by rejecting the Truth, while the children of the woman *Wisdom* prove themselves to be wise by using the Truth to prepare themselves beforehand. How will they prepare? By “growing in *Wisdom*,” of course.

The Wisdom of the Word of God

I have already explained that the *Word of God* (Christ, the Lord, Truth, etc.) mentioned in the Scriptures is the *Living Word of God*. (See “Some People Will Make Light of Anything,” *The Voice of Elijah*, April 1994.) It is an *oral tradition* that God expected His People to **hand down** from one generation to the next orally. The Early Church failed to **hand down** that “Word” as God expected. But lamenting that fact serves no useful purpose today. The best one can do now is move forward in a personal quest to understand the Truth of the Scriptures.

Here I want to explain that, from God’s perspective, the *Living Word of God* the Church was supposed to **hand down** from generation to generation is the embodiment of all wisdom. Moreover, I want to show you the Apostles understood belief in that *Word of God* to be an act of *Wisdom*. Finally, I want to suggest that only those who believe the Truth of the *Word of God* (as opposed to Satan’s distortion of it) are “children of *Wisdom*.” They alone are *wise*. They alone will **inherit what was promised** when God finally **fulfills the promise** at

the Judgment. All others will have succumbed to the delusion provided by Satan’s lies, thus proving themselves to be children of the Liar, conceived in the *Harlot* and delivered to destruction.

Jesus plainly said those who know the Truth here at the End will be hated by all who desperately want to believe the lies on which Satan is seeking to “build his house.” Undoubtedly, that will be in part because they will have, as He described it, a “wisdom which none of your opponents will be able to resist or refute”:

And they questioned Him, saying, “Teacher, when therefore will these things be? And what {will be} the sign when these things are about to take place?” And He said, “See to it that you be not misled; for many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am {He},’ and, ‘The time is at hand;’ do not go after them. And when you hear of wars and disturbances, do not be terrified; for these things must take place first, but the end {does} not {follow} immediately.” Then He continued by saying to them, “Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be great earthquakes, and in various places plagues and famines; and there will be terrors and great signs from heaven. But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and will persecute you, delivering you to the synagogues and prisons, bringing you before kings and governors for My name’s sake. It will lead to an opportunity for your testimony. So make up your minds not to prepare beforehand to defend yourselves; for I will give you utterance and

wisdom which none of your opponents will be able to resist or refute. But you will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and they will put {some} of you to death, and you will be hated by all on account of My name. Yet not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your lives.”
(Luke 21:7–19)

The wisdom necessary for ordinary individuals to refute the foolishness of educated theologians can only be found in an accurate understanding of the message of Scripture. That Truth will demand long hours of study to master. Yet knowledge of the Truth concealed in Scripture will be absolutely essential for True Believers to see through Satan’s lies here at the End. Without it, one will be left completely at the mercy of the coming delusion.

Nevertheless, the majority in our time will never consider the extreme importance God has placed on a knowledge of the Truth. That is unfortunate. They will be ensnared because, instead of seeking Truth, they will seek for a “sign,” and Satan will readily comply with “lying signs and wonders” (2 Thess. 2:9–10). In that, they are just like the Pharisees whom Jesus condemned for blindly holding to their *tradition* rather than seeking Truth:

And as the crowds were increasing, He began to say, “This generation is a wicked generation; it seeks for a sign, and {yet} no sign shall be given to it but the sign of Jonah. For just as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so shall the

“The wisdom necessary for ordinary individuals to refute the foolishness of educated theologians can only be found in an accurate understanding of the message of Scripture.”

“The ‘good news’ the Apostles preached was that, in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God fulfilled the Word He had spoken through Moses and the Prophets.”

Son of Man be to this generation. The Queen of the South shall rise up with the men of this generation at the judgment and condemn them, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here. The men of Nineveh shall stand up with this generation at the judgment and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.
(Luke 11:29–32)

The “something greater than Solomon” that Jesus referred to was Himself, the *Living Word of God*. As I explained in the last issue, the Apostle Paul calls that *Word* a variety of things. (See “Some People Will Make Light of Anything,” *The Voice of Elijah*, April 1994.) Quite often he calls it “the Gospel.” He does so, however, because the Greek word normally translated “gospel” in the New Testament (Greek: εὐαγγέλιον) actually means “good news.”

The “good news” the Apostles preached was that, in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God fulfilled the *Word* He had spoken through Moses and the Prophets. Therefore, Paul could use the term *Gospel* as more or less a synonym for the *oral tradition* Jesus Christ had revealed to him. That was possible, however, only because that “*Word*” is—like the “good news” of the “Gospel”—summed up in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul explains how “the Gospel”—which he also calls the “word of the cross”—is foolishness to “those who are perishing,” although it is in fact the *Wisdom of God*:

I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, that no man should say you were baptized in my name. Now I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized any other. For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to

preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, that the cross of Christ should not be made void. For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written, “I WILL DESTROY THE WISDOM OF THE WISE, AND THE CLEVERNESS OF THE CLEVER I WILL SET ASIDE.”

Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not {come to} know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For indeed Jews ask for signs, and Greeks search for wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are, that no man should boast before God. But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and

“Paul clearly identifies the ‘word of the cross’ as the ‘power of God.’”

redemption, that, just as it is written, “LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD.”

And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.
(1 Corinthians 1:14–2:5)

Paul reveals his understanding of the *Wisdom of God* by his quotation of Isaiah 29:14. We will look at that verse later. But first let’s summarize what he has written. He begins by saying he did not baptize any of the Corinthians except perhaps one or two families because God did not send him to baptize but to preach the Gospel. He then digresses and mentions the fact that he didn’t even preach the Gospel with any great oratorical flair lest he diminish the importance of the work Christ had accomplished on the cross.

He comments that “the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” The thing to note in that statement is the fact that Paul clearly identifies the “word of the cross” as the “power of God.”

Paul quotes Isaiah 29:14 as confirmation that God intended all along to confound the wisdom of the wise in this world. His understanding of how God did that is “through the foolishness of the message preached.” To this point, he has equated “the Gospel” with the “word of the cross” and the “message preached.” That confirms he had in mind the definite content of the *Living Word of God* Jesus Christ had revealed to him and the other Apostles.

**“Paul is talking about the fact that the content of the message he preached
—that is, Jesus Christ, the Living Word of God—
becomes wisdom when it is believed.”**

Paul next identifies the content of the message he preached as “the wisdom of God.” Specifically, it is “Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” He is *talking about* Jesus Christ as the *Living Word of God*. Therefore, after reminding the Believers at Corinth that not many Believers are “wise,” “mighty,” or “noble,” he says, “But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God.”

Paul is *talking about* the fact that the content of the message he preached—that is, Jesus Christ, the *Living Word of God*—becomes wisdom when it is believed. The Believer then finds himself/herself “in Christ.” That is a *parabolic statement* informed by the fact that Jesus Christ is *Corporate Israel* and True Believers become members of *Corporate Israel* through belief in the Truth.

Paul affirms again that he did not preach his message, which he now calls the “testimony of God,” in any dynamic way “that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.” He is contrasting the “wisdom of men” and the “power of God” because, as he has already indicated, the “power of God” resides in the message he preached, and the content of that message becomes wisdom to the one who believes it. Then he makes this potent reference to the wisdom he saw contained in the message he preached:

Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; but we speak God’s wisdom in a mystery, the hidden {wisdom}, which God predestined before the ages to our glory; {the wisdom} which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory; but just as it is written, “THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND {which} HAVE NOT ENTERED THE

*HEART OF MAN,
ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR
THOSE WHO LOVE HIM.”*

*For to us God revealed {them} through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the {thoughts} of a man except the spirit of the man, which is in him? Even so the {thoughts} of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual {thoughts} with spiritual {words}. **But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.** But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no man. For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE SHOULD INSTRUCT HIM? But we have the mind of Christ.
(1 Corinthians 2:6–16)*

**“Jesus Christ is
Corporate Israel
and True Believers
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the Truth.”**

Paul clearly understood that the content of the message he preached was wisdom. It was specifically “God’s wisdom in a mystery, the hidden {wisdom}, which God predestined before the ages to our glory; {the wisdom} which none of the rulers of this age has understood.” When taken together with his earlier quotation of

Isaiah 29:14, that statement tells us he is *talking about* the “wisdom of God” hidden in *The Teaching of Moses* and *The Teaching of the Prophets*.

Note carefully that Paul tells us the things God has prepared for the Elect can be found fully described in *The Mystery*. Those things cannot be understood by the “natural man,” however, “because they are spiritually appraised.” [See “The Natural Man Is an Idiot (When It Comes to the Truth)” *The Voice of Elijah*, October 1993.] He then concludes with a quotation of Isaiah 40:13 and an affirmation that True Believers “have the mind of Christ.” We’ll take a look at Isaiah 40:13 below, but first let’s take a look at the context in which Isaiah 29:14 occurs:

*Be delayed and wait.
Blind yourselves and be blind.
They become drunk, but not with wine;
They stagger, but not with strong drink.
For the LORD has poured over you a
spirit of deep sleep,
He has shut your eyes, the prophets;
And He has covered your heads,
the seers.
And the entire vision shall be to you like
the words of a sealed book, which when
they give it to the one who is literate, say-
ing, “Please read this,” he will say, “I
cannot, for it is sealed.” Then the book
will be given to the one who is illiterate,
saying, “Please read this.” And he will
say, “I cannot read.”
Then the LORD said,
“Because this people draw near with
their words
And honor Me with their lip service,
But they remove their hearts far from
Me,
And their reverence for Me consists of
tradition learned {by rote},
Therefore behold, I will once again deal
marvelously with this people,
wondrously marvelous;
**And the wisdom of their wise men shall
perish,***

“Jesus Christ has already removed four of the seven seals from the Scriptures. He is going to remove the remaining three seals over the next few years so that revelation will no longer be necessary for one to understand the complete message of Scripture.”

And the discernment of their discerning men shall be concealed.”
(Isaiah 29:9–14)

Isaiah has just told you that God became angry after trying to deal with the idiocy of people who were unwilling to even consider the logic inherent in what Moses taught. So He told His Prophets to speak to them in enigmatic (*parabolic*) terms they couldn't understand. Consequently, the *parabolic statements* made by the Prophets became “like the words of a sealed book” in order to make fools of the wise of this world.

I'm sorry to be the one to inform you, but it doesn't matter whether you are a scholar who can read the Prophets in the original Hebrew or whether you are a layperson who can only read a translation. You won't be able to understand what they have written because their works have been sealed.

As I have already explained elsewhere, Jesus Christ revealed the message hidden in the Hebrew Scriptures to His Apostles after His resurrection. (See “Where Are Jesus' Disciples?” *The Voice of Elijah*, April 1991.) He did not, at that time, remove the seals God had placed on the Scriptures. What that *means* is, after the Early Church lost its understanding of the message of Scripture as the result of things taught by Clement of Alexandria and Origen, revelation was the only way to regain what had been lost. (See “Did You Mean That Literally?” and “The Origen of Folly,” *The Voice of Elijah*, January 1993.) That situation is changing in our own time.

Jesus Christ has already removed four of the seven seals from the Scriptures. He is going to remove the remaining three seals over the next few years so that revelation will no longer be necessary for one to understand the complete message of Scripture. (See “Did Jesus Leave a Will?” *The Voice of Elijah*, July 1991.) Then anyone who wants to under-

stand what the Prophets said will have opportunity to do so. All they will need to do is read the Scriptures for themselves. Circumstances will then be what the Church has mistakenly claimed they have been all along.

That sounds a bit far-fetched, doesn't it? Scoffers will scoff. The wise of this world will never consider the possibility it might be true. But pity the idiot who waits until the final chapter is published to decide whether what I teach is true. A word to the wise: You aren't going to find what you are looking for in the things I make available to the general public. Those things merely provide “testimony” against a generation who has no interest in knowing the Truth. They are nothing more than evidence attesting to the vapidness of fools who refuse to believe. But I digress. Let's get back to what Paul wrote to the Corinthians.

The Way of Wisdom

Toward the end of the passage from 1 Corinthians that I quoted above, Paul quoted another verse from Isaiah—Isaiah 40:13. Before looking at that verse, let's first look at another passage where Paul quotes the same verse:

For just as you once were disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience, so these also now have been disobedient, in order that because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown mercy. For God has shut up all in disobedience that He

“Jesus Christ revealed the message hidden in the Hebrew Scriptures to His Apostles after His resurrection.”

might show mercy to all. Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, OR WHO BECAME HIS COUNSELOR? Or WHO HAS FIRST GIVEN TO HIM THAT IT MIGHT BE PAID BACK TO HIM AGAIN? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him {be} the glory forever. Amen.
(Romans 11:30–36)

You can tell from his exuberant outburst over “the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God” that Paul saw in Isaiah 40:13 a reference to the wisdom God has hidden in the Old Testament Gospel of Jesus Christ. That being the case, it only makes sense to take a look at what Isaiah wrote:

Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD, Or as His counselor has informed Him? With whom did He consult and {who} gave Him understanding? And {who} taught Him in the path of justice and taught Him knowledge, And informed Him of the way of understanding?
(Isaiah 40:13–14)

It isn't obvious to the casual reader, but Isaiah is pointing to things written in the Book of Proverbs, particularly things found in Proverbs 1–9. You see, it is not just a matter of New Testament authors like Paul quoting Old Testament Scripture. It is a matter of all the later authors of Scripture quoting the authors of Scripture who came before them.

For example, Jeremiah and Ezekiel quote extensively from things that Moses wrote in the Pentateuch, particularly from the parallel passages found in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28–29. However, Ezekiel quotes most often from Leviticus 26, perhaps because he was a priest and was more familiar with

what he found written there. For his own purposes, Jeremiah most often quotes from Deuteronomy 28–29.

The same sort of implied preference for one part of Scripture applies to Isaiah. He appears to have had a decided fondness for things he found in the Book of Proverbs. However, Isaiah, like Jeremiah and Ezekiel, is merely providing additional explanation of things he found explained in the Scripture he quotes. That's why he mentions "the path of justice" and "the way of understanding" in the passage quoted above. He is pointing to things Solomon said concerning *The Way* in the Book of Proverbs.

As I explained in the first volume of *The Mystery of Scripture* and in *The Way, The Truth, The Life* tape series, "*The Way*" is the appellation the author of the Pentateuch assigned to *The Teaching of Moses*. You can see, therefore, that the point of Isaiah 40:13 is simple. Nobody taught God "the path of justice" or "the way of understanding." Quite the contrary. He was the One who revealed *The Way* to Moses. "*The Way*" is what Paul calls the "wisdom and knowledge of God." Paul's phraseology stems from what Moses himself said concerning *The Way* he taught the sons of Israel:

"See, I have taught you statutes and judgments just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should do thus in the land where you are entering to possess it. So keep and do {them}, for that is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.'"
(Deuteronomy 4:5–6)

In what we have read thus far, we can see Paul is referring back to *The Way of Moses* he found hidden, but fully explained, in the Hebrew Scriptures. His understanding of what Isaiah had written concerning *The Way* in Isaiah 40:13 is what caused him to suddenly rejoice in his knowledge of that "wisdom" while writing to the Romans. Paul knew that the content of *The Way of Moses* is *The Mystery* that Jesus Christ revealed to His Apostles, who then **handed it down** to the Early Church as an *oral tradition*. That *Living Word of*

God is also the "Spirit" (*pneuma*) of Jesus Christ Himself, Who is the *Word of God* (John 1:1). That is what Paul is *talking about* in the following passage:

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles—if indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God's grace which was given to me for you; that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. And by referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; {to be specific}, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, of which I was made a minister, according to the gift of God's grace which was given to me according to the working of His power. To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God, who created all things; in order that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly {places}.
(Ephesians 3:1–10)

Did you understand all that? Paul has just told you the essence of *The Mystery* hidden in the Hebrew Scriptures that Jesus Christ revealed to him and the other Apostles consists in the fact that Jesus Christ is *Corporate Israel* and that, "in Christ," Gentiles have become "fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise." The "body" Paul has in mind is Jesus Christ, Who is *Corporate Israel*, as I have explained in *Not All Israel Is Israel* (p. 208). The "Christ" he has in mind, however, is the *Living Word of God*, which is also "the manifold wisdom of God." That *Wisdom* was "made known through the church to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly {places}." It was also made known to Believers in the Early Church as

The Apostolic Teaching until it was lost. Then the *Wisdom of God* reverted back to being *The Mystery*, securely hidden in the Hebrew Scriptures.

It is important to understand that, when Paul says "in Christ," he *means* "in the *Living Word of God*." For him, those two are undeniably linked in *The Mystery*, which is the *Wisdom of God*. That becomes clear in what he writes to the Colossians:

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of His body (which is the church) in filling up that which is lacking in Christ's afflictions. Of {this church} I was made a minister according to the stewardship from God bestowed on me for your benefit, that I might fully carry out the {preaching of} the word of God, {that is}, the mystery which has been hidden from the {past} ages and generations; but has now been manifested to His saints, to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. And we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ. And for this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me. For I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf, and for those who are at Laodicea, and for all those who have

"It is not just a matter of New Testament authors like Paul quoting Old Testament Scripture. It is a matter of all the later authors of Scripture quoting the authors of Scripture who came before them."

not personally seen my face, that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and {attaining} to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, {resulting} in a true knowledge of God's mystery, {that is}, Christ {Himself}, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. I say this in order that no one may delude you with persuasive argument. For even though I am absent in body, nevertheless I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good discipline and the stability of your faith in Christ.

(Colossians 1:24–2:5)

Paul first identifies the “word of God,” as “the mystery which has been hidden from the {past} ages and generations.” He then mentions “the riches of the glory of this mystery,” and identifies *The Mystery* as “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” That contrasts somewhat with his identification of the content of *The Mystery* as the fact “that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 3:6).

On the one hand Paul says *The Mystery* is “Christ in you.” On the other it is the fact that Believers are *heirs* “in Christ.” However, he brings the two together in what he says here. After telling us *The Mystery* is “Christ in you,” he tells us “we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ.”

The fact that Paul mentions teaching and admonishing alerts us to the fact that he considered the content of the message he and the other Apostles taught to be an extremely important part of the process of attaining wisdom. He makes that point in a statement in which he identifies Jesus Christ Himself as a knowledge of *The Mystery*. He says it is “all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, {resulting} in a true knowledge of God's mystery, {that is}, Christ {Himself}, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”

He begins the passage by mentioning “the wealth” that can be found in “the riches of the glory of this mystery,” but he then equates that “wealth” with Jesus

“The content of The Way of Moses is The Mystery that Jesus Christ revealed to His Apostles, who then handed it down to the Early Church as an oral tradition.”

Christ Himself, the *Living Word of God*. He concludes the passage by saying “I say this in order that no one may delude you with persuasive argument.” That tells us he was summarizing the high points of a coherent body of information that could not be disputed easily.

Paul considered the wisdom that comes from a knowledge of the Truth to be incredibly valuable to the Believer. As he puts it, it is “wealth” and “treasures.” There is nothing in what he says here to indicate where he gained that concept. He got it from reading what the author of the Book of Proverbs said concerning the *Wisdom of God* (Prov. 8:18–19). In that connection, take note also of what he wrote the Ephesians concerning “the riches of His grace” that are available to those “in Christ”:

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished upon us. In all wisdom and insight He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him.

(Ephesians 1:7–9)

Paul understood that true wealth comes from a wisdom based on knowledge of the Truth that lies hidden in the Hebrew Scriptures. He calls that Truth *The Mystery*. However, he also clearly understood that, if one is ever to gain that wisdom, God must grant it:

For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which {exists} among you, and your love for all the saints, do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention {of you} in

my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him.

(Ephesians 1:15–17)

Under such circumstances, is it any wonder James exhorts Believers to pray for wisdom? Look at what he said:

But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.

(James 1:5–6)

The Validation of Wisdom

The wisdom James has in mind depends on a knowledge of what Paul calls *The Mystery*. Yet possession of that wisdom is much more than just a knowledge or understanding of the bare facts of the biblical message. It is a thorough understanding of *The Mystery* that prompts appropriate action on the part of the Believer. That becomes clear from what James writes later in his letter:

Who among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and {so} lie against the truth. This wisdom is not that which comes down from above, but is earthly, natural, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

(James 3:13–18)

James is pointing out the sharp contrast that exists between “the wisdom from above” and a wisdom that is “earthly, natural, demonic.” What he has

in mind are the two types of wisdom one can obtain from a knowledge of the Truth.

The Believer who has the first type of wisdom expresses knowledge of the Truth in outward activity compatible with the content of the Truth hidden in *The Mystery*. A person who has the other type of wisdom displays an eager desire to “show what he knows” by teaching others rather than focusing on living according to the Truth he understands. That is why James leads into the passage quoted above with a warning that Teachers will incur stricter judgment (James 3:1). He follows that with a description of the dangers inherent in a person *talking about* things in *The Teaching* when they may understand those things only vaguely (James 3:5–12).

The importance of personal conduct as evidence that one possesses the *Wisdom of God* is the point of what James has written. The Apostle Paul stresses much the same thing in a passage where he again mentions *The Mystery*:

Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with {an attitude of} thanksgiving; praying at the same time for us as well, that God may open up to us a door for the word, so that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ, for which I have also been imprisoned; in order that I may make it clear in the way I ought to speak. Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity.
(Colossians 4:2–5)

This passage clearly identifies *The Mystery* as the *Word* Paul preached. It is the message he “spoke forth.” However, the point I want to make is summed up in his admonition to “Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders.” He is referring to those “outside” *Corporate Israel*—that is, those who are not “in Christ,” those who fail to understand and believe the Truth. True Believers must respond to such “outsiders” with wisdom, recognizing there are various types of unbelievers. Some will tell you outright they don’t believe what you believe. Others will insist they believe, but cannot produce the required “fruit.” Still others will be almost impossible to identify because they firmly believe their own pretense to be true.

The person who wants to understand *The Mystery of God* out of curiosity or, even worse, out of a desire to teach others, is an “outsider.” God did not provide Truth so that fools could use it to “show what they know.” He provided it as the “power of God” so that those who truly believe might be empowered to overcome the world. Don’t be deceived in that regard, however. The Apostle Paul knew that in these Last Days there would be Pretenders throughout the Church pushing their own agenda:

But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God; holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; and avoid such men as these. For among them are those who enter into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.

(2 Timothy 3:1–7)

You who are True Believers must realize that not everyone who claims to believe the Truth actually understands the same things you understand. Beware especially of those who vehemently deny the Truth you have heard. They are going to create “difficult times” for you, provided you actually do believe. It makes sense that only True Believers would seek to understand the Truth as accurately as they possibly can. Therefore, you can most often identify Pretenders by the attitude they exhibit toward the Truth. Let me give you one example.

My calling is to provide you the materials necessary for you to grow spiritually. That is all I intend to do. I will not tell you what you must do or even what you should do in your particular circumstances. There will be Pretenders, however, who esteem their own intellectual capabilities more highly than your own. These fools will take the Truth I provide and, after mixing it with their own ideas

and opinions, readily tell you what you should do. Beware of anyone who wants to make you live according to their own notion of right and wrong. If you are a True Believer, you already know what is right and wrong for you. Don’t let them drag you back into their legalistic bondage.

Nothing can be done to prevent idiocy on the part of fools who fail to understand what God seeks to accomplish in your life through the *Living Word*. I can only warn you concerning the folly of Pretenders and remind you that God has provided “all things” that you need in *The Teaching*:

Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become foolish that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God. For it is written, “{He is} THE ONE WHO CATCHES THE WISE IN THEIR CRAFTINESS”; and again, “THE LORD KNOWS THE REASONINGS of the wise, THAT THEY ARE USELESS.” So then let no one boast in men. For all things belong to you, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or things present or things to come; all things belong to you, and you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God.

(1 Corinthians 3:18–23)

You can believe what I have written in the various books and articles published thus far if you care to. You can disbelieve it if you dare to. I don’t really care one way or the other. A violent, vengeful God of Truth is coming to destroy those who love the lies of the Liar and so hate the Truth. If that be true, now is certainly not the time for you to go on conducting “business as usual.”

There is only one way to escape the wrath of God. That is by believing the Truth. Yet those fools who are wise in their own eyes will never consider the possibility that what I teach might be true. Unfortunately for them, however, and as foolish as it may seem, salvation is by faith (belief) alone. That is faith (belief) in the sense of *what you believe*, not the ludicrous notion in vogue today that Christian faith *means* nothing more than *that you believe*. ■

Q & A nswers

The Voice of Elijah publishes articles based on the findings of *The Elijah Project*, a private research group headed by Larry D. Harper. In this column we seek answers to general-interest questions concerning the findings, purpose and philosophy of this project.

Editor: I want to begin by reading a letter we received recently:

Dear Sirs:

I regret to say that I do not wish to continue my subscription to your newsletter. Please cancel it immediately and return my subscription fee. Upon reading your publication, I began to sense something was not right. I pored over your literature trying to find a definitive statement of what it was you believe. What I found was vague references to "The Apostolic Teaching," "Pretenders," and a general sense that you espouse some sort of secret knowledge that was lost and you rediscovered—that sounds like Gnosticism to me. The writer featured in your newsletter is arrogant, rude, unloving, and totally contrary in attitude to the manner that Jesus approached the lost. I showed your materials to my pastor, who concurred with me that your literature appears cultic. I have also contacted the Christian Research Institute about your "Project" and your newsletter. I will be sending your materials to them if they are not familiar with you in order to do what I can to stop your heresy.

I exhort you not to reject the whole counsel of God in the Word. Do not esteem the writings of man above scripture. Repent and know it is by grace you are saved.

How do you respond to that?

Elijah: What do you want me to say? The individual sounds to me like a typical "lad lacking a heart," as the writer of Proverbs puts it. So, what's the point?



Editor: I thought you might want to respond to his assessment of the things you have written. From what you have said previously about intentionally provoking Pretenders, I also thought you might comment on his reaction. Surely you have something to say.

Elijah: Why do you insist on doing this to me? All you want is to see me get worked up over somebody's inanity. All right. You asked for it; you got it. Let me see the letter He says he canceled his subscription, so I assume he won't be reading what I say. Is that right?

Editor: Right.

Elijah: That's good. I don't want to be found guilty of rebuking a fool. [Editor: He's alluding to Proverbs 9:7.] I also assume from the date on the letter that he only received the April 1994 issue of *The Voice of Elijah* and the booklet *The AntiChrist*. Is that right?

Editor: Right.

Elijah: So now we know the little bit he read and responded to negatively. That also tells us what he "pored over ... trying to find a definitive statement of what it was you believe." That little bit of reading must have taxed his mental capacity severely if he had to "pore over" it.

You can get a fairly good idea of where the "lad" stands from that statement. He's a fellow who doesn't like to think, much less think for himself. He wants things condensed down, I suppose, into familiar "sound bites" he has already heard. He probably becomes extremely uncomfortable and agitated when someone starts talking in terms other than the vague "Christian" clichés you hear bandied about nowadays. It hasn't occurred to him that nobody knows what all those clichés mean, but everybody uses them because they are part of the "Christian" norm. Meaningless phrases are especially useful to Pretenders like your "lad," however. Once they learn to talk the lingo, they gain immediate acceptance in "Christian" circles.

I can also see the "lad" wants to stand together with others in a crowd—which is normal for Pretenders. They aren't always sure what they believe, so they depend on others to tell them that what they want to believe is true. That's why he consulted his pastor. It's

interesting he says he “began to sense something was not right” as soon as he started reading. What does he mean by “right”? Right, schmight. Why didn’t he say “true”? I’ll tell you why: The minute he started reading he was already looking for the same old worn-out Christian clichés he has already heard. When he didn’t find them, what I wrote didn’t seem “right” to him. It never dawned on him to ask whether or not it was true. Why should it? He wasn’t looking for Truth. He is one of those Paul mentions in 2 Thessalonians. Just for the record, let me read that passage:

And then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; {that is}, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. And for this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they might believe what is false, in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness.

(2 Thessalonians 2:8–12)

The part about “those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved” aptly describes your “lad.” He has no concern for whether or not something is true. His only concern is whether or not it is “right”—“right” being defined as what he already believes. The sad thing in that regard, however, is the content of his belief is totally summed up in the same old meaningless Christian clichés he has identified as somehow or other containing the totality of Christian “truth.” That comes through clearly in his distorted quotation of Ephesians 2 at the end of his letter. Let me read what Paul actually wrote:

But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly {places}, in Christ Jesus, in order that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, {it is} the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast.

(Ephesians 2:4–9)

Your “lad” is like the majority of “Christians” today. They believe God’s “grace” is all it takes for them to be saved. That’s why he misquoted what Paul actually said. Paul said we are “saved through faith” and “by grace.” In other words, the effective agent of our salvation is faith—belief—and we have opportunity to be saved only because God, in His *grace*, has given us such an opportunity. As I’ve told your readers time and again, it is impossible to have *saving faith*—belief—without having a definite content you believe. I’ve also said everybody believes something about God, so *what* you believe is much more important than *that* you believe.

Your “lad” hasn’t stopped to consider those facts. He implies the content of one’s faith is important in what he says about “heresy,” but he doesn’t actually believe it is. He prefers to believe God will give him salvation unconditionally as long as he continues to spout the same old clichés he has heard in the Church. I dare say the fellow is in for a rude awakening on Judgment Day.

It’s interesting he concluded that I “espouse some sort of secret knowledge that was lost and you rediscovered.” He got that partly right. But then he says, “that sounds like Gnosticism to me.” Now why would he mindlessly compare me to the Gnostics? That’s the problem with people who don’t want to think for themselves. They not only love their meaningless clichés, they are also quick to apply labels, particularly negative ones. I teach no doctrine that is “secret” in the gnostic sense. I’ve already told you John Calvin stated my position perfectly. [Editor: See “The Natural Man Is an Idiot (When It Comes to the Truth)” *The Voice of Elijah*, October 1993.] If what I teach is “secret,” it is only because the “natural man” can’t understand it. Your “lad” has given us a perfect demonstration of that fact. The Apostles, the Early Church Fathers and the leaders of the Protestant Reformation knew all about that kind of “secret” doctrine. But I don’t suppose your “lad” has ever read what Paul wrote to the Corinthians. Let me read that for you:

And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God. For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. And my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God. Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; but we speak God’s wisdom in a

mystery, the hidden {wisdom}, which God predestined before the ages to our glory; {the wisdom} which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory; but just as it is written,

*“THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD,
AND {which} HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN,
ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM.”*

For to us God revealed {them} through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the {thoughts} of a man except the spirit of the man, which is in him? Even so the {thoughts} of God no one knows except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things freely given to us by God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual {thoughts} with spiritual {words}. But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised.

(1 Corinthians 2:1–14)

Now that Paul has explained the “secret” nature of the Truth I teach, I ask you again: Why would your “lad” mindlessly compare me to the Gnostics? They never claimed to have “rediscovered” anything that was “lost.” On the contrary, because they were one of Satan’s counterfeits, they claimed Jesus Christ *handed down* their “secret” doctrines to them by revelation, just as the Scriptures tell us Jesus Christ *handed down The Apostolic Teaching* to the Apostles. [Editor: See “Some People Will Make Light of Anything,” *The Voice of Elijah*, April 1994.] I’m not like the Gnostics in that respect either. I don’t claim revelation of any kind. So why would your “lad” compare me to the Gnostics? Probably because he’s mindlessly repeating what his pastor said.

However, if this fellow and his pastor understood I claim to have “rediscovered” something the Church “lost,” why didn’t they compare me to Martin Luther or John Calvin, the Fathers of the Protestant Reformation, instead of stupidly comparing me to the Gnostics? I assume the “lad” and his pastor have heard about Luther and Calvin since they regard themselves to be Protestant “Christians.” Being Protestants, they have to say that the leaders of the Protestant Reformation taught what was “right,” in spite of the fact that they probably have not even considered the implications of what the Reformers believed.

I’ve already argued the evidence in that case against them. [Editor: See “Protestants All Agree on This: Somebody Laid an Egg!” *The Voice of Elijah*, January 1994.] Luther and Calvin both claimed to have “rediscovered” crucial doctrines the Roman Catholic Church had “lost.” Therefore, your “lad” and his pastor should know full well that I’m not saying anything new in that regard. What’s good for the goose must be good for the gander. They can’t have it both ways. If they are Protestant “Christians,” they have already conceded that the Church “lost” something and some Protestant leader “rediscovered” it. Does that make them Gnostic? If it does, then I guess I must be Gnostic as well.

I’ve already shown that the founders of all the major Protestant denominations agreed with the leaders of the Protestant Reformation in saying that the Church “lost” something. Moreover, they all claimed to have “rediscovered” what they thought the Church had “lost.” Under those circumstances, how can any Protestant reject my claim that the Church “lost” some essential belief? The most they can legitimately argue against me and still remain intellectually honest is that some Protestant denomination or the other has already “rediscovered” everything the Roman Catholic Church “lost.” That’s an impossible case to argue. As I’ve mentioned before, absence of presence does not prove non-existence. [Editor: See “The Demons Also Believe (Poor Devils!)” *The Voice of Elijah*, October 1991.]

Now you know why the “lad” didn’t compare me to Luther and Calvin, the two most well-respected Protestant leaders. He couldn’t because he had already decided on the basis of the little bit he read that what I teach is not “right.” So he compared me to the Gnostics, not because I have anything in common with the Gnostics, but because it is always easier to slap a pejorative label on someone than it is to do a thorough investigation of what he/she believes. He did all that, however, only because what I teach isn’t the same old gibberish he and his fellow “Christian” Pretenders are used to hearing. If your “lad” had been seeking Truth instead of looking for familiar “Christian” clichés, he would have ordered all the back issues of your newsletter, along with all the books I’ve written, and “pored over” them to determine whether what I teach is “true.” Instead, he merely looked to see whether the little bit of information you sent him agreed with what he already believed to be “right.”

However, when he says, “The writer featured in your newsletter is arrogant, rude, unloving, and totally contrary in attitude to the manner Jesus approached the lost,” the “lad” discloses he is nothing but a Pretender. Most Pretenders know the Scriptures only secondhand.

That's because they are too lazy to read the Bible for themselves so as to discover the Truth it contains. They find it easier to listen to others and believe only those "sound bites" that allow them to continue to hide themselves in a lie. [Editor: He's alluding to what Isaiah said in Isaiah 28:14-18.]

Apparently, this "lad" has a particular fondness for the "vomit" you hear coming out of the mouths of most preachers today. [Editor: He's alluding to Is. 28:8.] I'm talking about the idiocy that describes Jesus Christ as such a gentle individual that He never spoke a rude or sarcastic word to anyone. Satan's agents have taught your "lad" all about how Jesus Christ was an all-loving, all-caring, never-a-bad-word-spoken type of Individual, and he believed it. In fact, he liked that nonsense so much that he never bothered to check the facts. What he has written tells me he must never have read Matthew 23. Let me read what Jesus said:

Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, saying, "The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say {things}, and do not do {them}. And they tie up heavy loads, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves are unwilling to move them with {so much as} a finger. But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries, and lengthen the tassels {of their garments}. And they love the place of honor at banquets, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called by men, Rabbi. But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers. And do not call {anyone} on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. And do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, {that is}, Christ. But the greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted.

*But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, **hypocrites**, because you shut off the kingdom of heaven from men; for you do not enter in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in. [Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, **hypocrites**, because you devour widows' houses, even while for a pretense you make long prayers; therefore you shall receive greater condemnation.]*

*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, **hypocrites**, because you travel about on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, **you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves**. Woe to you, **blind guides**, who say, 'Whoever swears by the tem-*

*ple, that is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obligated.' **You fools and blind men**; which is more important, the gold, or the temple that sanctified the gold? And, 'Whoever swears by the altar, {that} is nothing, but whoever swears by the offering upon it, he is obligated.' **You blind men**, which is more important, the offering or the altar that sanctifies the offering? Therefore he who swears by the altar, swears {both} by the altar and by everything on it. And he who swears by the temple, swears {both} by the temple and by Him who dwells within it. And he who swears by heaven, swears {both} by the throne of God and by Him who sits upon it.*

*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, **hypocrites!** For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. **You blind guides**, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel! Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, **hypocrites!** For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence. **You blind Pharisee**, first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also.*

*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, **hypocrites!** For you are like **whitewashed tombs** which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. Even so you too outwardly appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, **hypocrites!** For you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, and say, 'If we had been {living} in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partners with them in {shedding} the blood of the prophets.' Consequently you bear witness against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up then the measure {of the guilt} of your fathers.*

***You serpents, you brood of vipers, how shall you escape the sentence of hell?** Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city, that upon you may fall {the guilt of} all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Truly I say to you, all these things shall come upon this generation."*

(Matthew 23:1-36)

I wonder if the Pharisees thought Jesus was perhaps a bit "arrogant, rude, unloving, and totally contrary in

attitude” when He called them “snakes,” “hypocrites,” “fools,” “blind guides,” “blind men,” and “sons of hell”? What do you think? Maybe they thought He didn’t actually *mean* what He said. Maybe He was just trying to provoke them. [Editor: He’s mocking the “lad” by alluding to things he has already told our readers about acting “rude and arrogant” in order to intentionally “provoke” a negative response from Pretenders. [See “Questions & Answers,” *The Voice of Elijah*, April 1993, July 1993, and January 1994.]

How do you think Jesus appeared to the Pharisees when He told them they were Satan’s children? I imagine they never once considered that “rude or unloving.” Let me read you what He said:

*“Why do you not understand what I am saying? [It is] because you cannot hear My word. **You are of {your} father the devil,** and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own {nature}; for he is a liar, and the father of lies.”*
(John 8:43–44)

Actually, I’m just making fun of your “lad” for being so stupid. I already know the Pharisees took exception to the insults Jesus threw their way. A lawyer testified to that fact on one occasion when Jesus not only rudely refused to wash His hands as expected by the Pharisee who had invited Him to dinner, He also told the Pharisee his religious traditions were ridiculous. When the lawyer challenged what He said, Jesus insulted him as well:

*Now when He had spoken, a Pharisee asked Him to have lunch with him; and He went in, and reclined {at the table}. And when the Pharisee saw it, he was surprised that He had not first ceremonially washed before the meal. But the Lord said to him, **“Now you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and of the platter; but inside of you, you are full of robbery and wickedness. You foolish ones, did not He who made the outside make the inside also? But give that which is within as charity, and then all things are clean for you. But woe to you Pharisees! For you pay tithe of mint and rue and every {kind of} garden herb, and {yet} disregard justice and the love of God; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the front seats in the synagogues, and the respectful greetings in the market places. Woe to you! For you are like concealed tombs, and the people who walk over {them} are unaware {of it}.”** And one of the law-*

*yers said to Him in reply, “Teacher, when You say this, You insult us too.” But He said, “Woe to you lawyers as well! For you weigh men down with burdens hard to bear, while you yourselves will not even touch the burdens with one of your fingers. **Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets, and fit was} your fathers {who} killed them. Consequently, you are witnesses and approve the deeds of your fathers; because it was they who killed them, and you build {their tombs}.”***
(Luke 11:37–48)

Since Jesus was never “rude, arrogant, or unloving,” as your “lad” wants to believe, He must have said all those nasty things in the nicest sort of way. So let me take this opportunity to say I believe your “lad” and his pastor are “fools” and “blind men.” I am also convinced they are “snakes,” the blindly obedient offspring of their father Satan, the father of all “snakes.” The pastor is a “hypocrite,” a “blind guide” leading the “blind.” Furthermore, both of them are “sons of hell,” headed for hell in a handbasket of their own making, which is exactly what they deserve because they are misleading others by teaching the lies they believe. Neither one of them could understand what I had written in the April 1994 issue because they are both children of their father the devil, the Liar, the father of all lies, and they want to do what he desires.

There, now I’ve said exactly the same things that Jesus said. And I said them in the most humble, loving, and caring way I possibly could. Just in case that doesn’t suffice, however, I’ll also tell you the “lad” and his pastor are both “stinking caskets” and “whitewashed walls.” [Editor: He’s mockingly referring to what Paul called the high priest in Acts 23:3.]

The problem with Satan’s children is they have no concern for the Truth. They want everybody to go along and get along—until someone starts to see through their charade and tell the Truth as it is. Then they get “rude, unloving, and totally contrary in attitude” in a hurry. Look at the facts: This fellow condemns me for exhibiting specific characteristics, which *means* he must think it wrong for a “Christian” to act that way. However, he immediately displays those same characteristics and directs his negative invective at me personally. His own words will condemn him in the Judgment.

I have not, until now, directed any of my statements at anyone personally. However, since this fool stepped out of the crowd voluntarily, I have made an exception, not because I make it a practice to do that, but because he played the fool. Contrary to his goofy notion of Christian love, I see nothing wrong with displaying the char-

acteristics he mentions if they are necessary to point out the stupidity of the Pretenders in the Church today. What I do is, in fact, the most loving and caring thing you can do for those who are seeking to know the Truth but haven't been able to see through the pretense of the Pretenders all around them. I guess it's a matter of one man's poison being another man's pleasure. I haven't called anyone the "son of the devil" and struck them blind as Paul did, although in this "lad's" case I would certainly be willing to give it a try. [Editor: He's alluding to Acts 13:10-11.]

Who does this imbecile think he is, anyway? God? Does he actually think he is somehow going to "stop your heresy" by sending some little bit of information to a watchdog group? What can they do? Can they take away my right to free speech? Will they come and take me away in the night, lock me up and force me to recant under torture? It sounds to me like your "lad" is reacting emotionally to something I said that hit too close to home. He must subconsciously know that he is a Pretender, but he doesn't want others to discover the Truth. His intent in trying to "stop your heresy" is actually to warn others not to listen to me. He doesn't realize it is already too late. The Truth is out.

I hope the fool carries out his plan. If the people he sends your newsletter to are nothing more than a den of Pretenders, they probably won't bother to read what I have written either. And if God so desires, they will put out some sort of warning against this new "cultic" teaching. I wish them well. The Truth is, God is going to do what God is going to do, and neither hell nor high water is going to stop it now. The puny efforts of Pretenders are only going to work against them. They would be better off ignoring what I've written. That way *The Voice of Elijah* wouldn't be getting free publicity.

But what is this "cultic" "heresy" nonsense the idiot mentions? I teach nothing contrary to the Creeds of the Early Church. Does that make what I teach "cultic"? I teach nothing contrary to the basic doctrines the leaders of the Protestant Reformation taught. Does that make what I teach "cultic"? I stress the same "fundamentals" emphasized by the leaders of the Fundamentalist Movement in the early part of this century. Does that make what I teach "cultic"? I hold to the same authority of the divinely revealed Scriptures that John Calvin propounded. Does that make what I teach "cultic"? You know as well as I do that what I teach differs not at all with orthodox Christian doctrine. However, I will admit it does differ greatly with the distorted doctrines taught by Pretenders in the Church today. I suppose that makes it "cultic" from their point of view. But they don't be-

lieve the same doctrines the Church believed just a century and a half ago.

The "cultic" label does make me chuckle a bit though. I told you a couple of years ago that Satan would eventually bring up the "cultic" issue and try to use it to thwart what God intends to do. [Editor: See "Questions & Answers," *The Voice of Elijah*, April 1992 and April 1993.] He has been planning that defense for years. He knows he can easily make Pretenders believe that lie because they have no real interest in the Truth. But I know that True Believers will see right through it. I'm reminded of what Isaiah said about the events that will occur here at the End. He knew, as do I, that God has planned an awesome demonstration of His power:

*But now, thus says the LORD, your Creator, O Jacob,
And He who formed you, O Israel,
"Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name; you are Mine!
When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
And through the rivers, they will not overflow you.
When you walk through the fire, you will not be
scorched,
Nor will the flame burn you.
For I am the LORD your God,
The Holy One of Israel, your Savior;
I have given Egypt as your ransom,
Cush and Seba in your place.
Since you are precious in My sight,
{Since} you are honored and I love you,
I will give {other} men in your place and {other}
peoples in exchange for your life.
**Do not fear, for I am with you;
I will bring your offspring from the east,
And gather you from the west.
I will say to the north, 'Give {them} up!'
And to the south, 'Do not hold {them} back.'
Bring My sons from afar,
And My daughters from the ends of the earth,
Everyone who is called by My name,
And whom I have created for My glory,
Whom I have formed, even whom I have made."
Bring out the people who are blind, even though they
have eyes,
And the deaf, even though they have ears.
All the nations have gathered together
In order that the peoples may be assembled.
Who among them can declare this
And proclaim to us the former things?
Let them present their witnesses that they may be
justified,
Or let them hear and say, "It is true."
(Isaiah 43:1-9)***

That is all spoken in *parabolic images*, but you can still get the general idea. Isaiah has just told you that True Believers are going to find their “way” back to the Truth one way or the other here at the End. All I have to do is keep on writing, keep on teaching, keep on publishing the Truth, and those who have ears to hear will eventually hear and believe. They may be deaf now, but they are definitely going to hear the Truth. They may have been blinded by Satan’s lies temporarily, but they are certainly going to see, and when they see, they will see the pretense of Pretenders like your “lad” for exactly what it is—filthy rags. So let your “lad” and his idiotic fellow-Pretenders do their best to “stop your heresy.” More power to them. I need as much help as I can get, so I welcome their contribution to the cause. All they are going to accomplish in that regard is exactly what God intends. They are going to help me “weed out” Pretenders like themselves.

I already know God is working among His Own, bringing them back to the Truth one by one, because of the occasional letter that arrives, telling how God has dealt in the life of this person or the other. The most recent letter that crossed my desk was from a woman who said she was saved in 1978 and has since had experiences while praying that indicated to her that, among other things, she “needs to learn to listen” in order to find the Truth she wants to know. That woman’s humble attitude toward the Truth stands in sharp contrast to that of your “lad” who is certain he can rely on the grace of God and safely ignore anything that does not seem “right” to him because it is not spoken in the same old meaningless clichés he has already heard.

Attaching the “cultic” label to my teaching is the recourse of a moron who is too lazy to learn anything more than the goofy “sound bites” of Pretenders. I’m sorry to inform those who are too stupid to know any better, but there can’t be a “cult” when people don’t even meet together. Your moronic “lad” should accept the fact that his father Satan missed the mark in planning that defense against the Truth. I’ve told you before that I’m not here to gather people together. All I’m going to do is teach my understanding of the Scriptures. That’s nothing more than what every other Christian minister is, or should be, doing. Yet, while other ministers gather people together to teach, I am going to teach only through books, articles, audio and video tapes.

Furthermore, cult leaders control their followers through some sort of “mind control.” I’ve frequently stated my position on that issue, and I’ll state it again: I refuse to tell people what they should do or shouldn’t do. If they are True Believers, they already know what

they should do. So I don’t “counsel” people, and I don’t offer advice. All I do is teach the things I believe people need to know in order to be saved. Is that “cultic”? I don’t think so. Any minister of God who is worth his salt should be doing exactly the same thing. If listening to my teaching makes someone a member of a “cult,” then you better look closely at everybody who teaches anything. They must all be “cult leaders.”

The Truth is, I know exactly what I believe and why I believe it. So I teach what I believe, and tell people they must believe it in order to see through the incredible delusion Satan has planned. If that seems “cultic” to fools who don’t know what they believe or why they believe it, I apologize. I’m sorry they are fools. Every Christian should be as firmly convinced in his or her own mind as I am concerning whatever “truth” they have chosen to believe. I fully expect them to teach what they believe with the same fervency I do. But I don’t see the logic in them stupidly assailing someone else for doing exactly what they should be doing. I don’t name names when I talk about Pretenders. I assume those who understand the Truth I teach will be able to recognize Pretenders all by themselves. That stands in stark contrast to the folly of those who ignorantly label what I teach as “cultic.” I have already pointed out the risks run by those who name names. [Editor: He is alluding to “How Quickly They Do Blaspheme,” *The Voice of Elijah*, October 1992.] Your “lad” has placed himself in that column of fools.

Not only do I not use any sort of “mind control techniques,” I don’t encourage anyone to believe what I teach. As a matter of fact, I actively discourage people from following me personally by intentionally trying to provoke them into rejecting what I teach. I tell them all the time they can “believe it if they care to, disbelieve it if they dare to.” If anyone considers my implied threat of judgment as some sort of “mind control,” they should go read the “hell-fire and brimstone” that the great Evangelists John Wesley and Charles Finney preached. I’m actually quite tame in comparison to those two. I don’t expect most “Christians” today to agree with what I am doing, but I do expect them to have the good common sense to realize that, if God called me to teach what I teach, there is no way they or their father Satan are going to “stop” it as your “lad” seems to think he can. They would do well to follow the recommendation of the good teacher Gamaliel. Let me read what he said:

But a certain Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the Law, respected by all the people, stood up in the Council and gave orders to put the men outside for a

short time. And he said to them, "Men of Israel, take care what you propose to do with these men. For some time ago Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody; and a group of about four hundred men joined up with him. And he was slain; and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. After this man Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census, and drew away {some} people after him, he too perished, and all those who followed him were scattered. And so in the present case, I say to you, stay away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or action should be of men, it will be overthrown; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them; or else you may even be found fighting against God."

(Acts 5:34–39)

That is good advice for any Christian to follow. It is far better to spend time working constructively to "build" what one feels divinely called to "build" than to spend time trying to tear down what someone else is trying to "build." They may find themselves "fighting against God." But I suppose there will always be that stray fool who tries to empty the ocean with a teaspoon. [Editor: He is mockingly alluding to Hab. 2:14.] I apologize for those who think they can somehow thwart what God has planned here at the End. I'm sorry they are so stupid.

Editor: *I knew I could elicit a diatribe from you. But that was better than I expected. Are you sure you're finished? Wouldn't you care to say just a few more words to clarify your position? I'm kidding, of course.*

Elijah: Actually, I'm not finished. What is this final stupidity he mentions—"the whole counsel of God in the Word"? What does he think that *means*?

Editor: *What does he think it means? I don't know. I would imagine he is referring to something in the Scriptures. Perhaps he is alluding to the authority of Scripture.*

Elijah: Probably so. But the phrase didn't come from the Scriptures. It's nothing but another one of Satan's lies. It implies that every Christian somehow comes away with the same understanding of the Scriptures when they read them. That's ignorant. It's also another example of how readily lazy people use the meaningless clichés they have picked up along the way. His pious sounding admonition reveals his blindness in that regard as well. Look at what he says next: "Do not esteem the writings of man above scripture."

Consider the implications of what that statement

tells you about him. He says he "pored over" the articles I wrote for the April [1994] issue, yet he never once understood what I wrote concerning the impossibility of reading what is written in Scripture without coming to some conclusion as to what it *means*. I explained all that in that issue. [Editor: See "Some People Will Make Light of Anything," *The Voice of Elijah*, April 1994.]

I also pointed out that, contrary to what your "lad" would have us believe, every Christian organization passes along its understanding of the message of Scripture *orally* and in various religious writings that explain its particular *oral tradition*. Yet this fellow couldn't understand any of what I had written. Instead, he blindly holds to some nebulous notion he has concerning "the whole counsel of God in the Word," as though all "Christians" agree on but one understanding of the message of the Scriptures and everybody gains that one understanding by reading the Scriptures for themselves. First of all, very few Christians agree on what the Scriptures say. But even if they did, how would this fool know what "the whole counsel of God in the Word" is? I dare say he seldom reads "the Word" for himself. He is too content with "Christian" clichés.

Editor: *Are you through now?*

Elijah: Yes. But I would like to read a passage from the Book of Proverbs for the benefit of the True Believers who read your newsletter. They will know what to do with it.

Editor: *Go ahead.*

Elijah: Proverbs 22:17–21 says this:

*Incline your ear and hear the words of the wise,
And apply your mind to my knowledge;
For it will be pleasant if you keep them within you,
That they may be ready on your lips.
So that your trust may be in the LORD,
I have taught you today, even you.
Have I not written to you excellent things
Of counsels and knowledge,
To make you know the certainty of the words of truth
That you may correctly answer to him who sent you?
(Proverbs 22:17–21)*

Editor: *Is that it?*

Elijah: That's it.

Editor: *Thanks. This has been an enjoyable session. Your tirades always are. But I think you need a bigger soapbox. You nearly fell off this one a couple of times. ■*

Constantine

From Page 1

Pretenders entered the Church under the “open-door” policies of Church leaders like Cyprian and Cornelius. (See “Puritans and Pretenders: Cyprian, Novatian, and the Lapsed,” *The Voice of Elijah*, January 1994.) The resulting “secularization” of the Church prepared the way for Constantine’s widespread acceptance as the first “Christian” emperor of the Roman Empire.

Political Developments in the Roman Empire, A.D. 284–305

The Roman Empire suffered decline during the reigns of Valerian and his son, Gallienus (253–268). Barbarian tribes from the North and Persians from the East successfully invaded and occupied parts of the Empire. The emperors who followed Valerian and Gallienus sought to regain lost territories, and by 284—when Diocletian came to power—most had been restored. There-

fore, Diocletian’s primary challenge lay in restoring the Empire to its former glory. He chose a novel way to accomplish his task. He divided the Empire.

In order to understand Diocletian’s innovations, one must have a rudimentary knowledge of the Roman custom of bestowing honorific titles on royalty. The two titles assumed by Roman rulers during this era—Augustus and Caesar—derive from the time of Gaius Julius Caesar, who ruled the Roman Empire from 48 to 44 B.C. Having no son of his own, Julius Caesar designated Octavian, the son of his niece, as his adopted son. He did so in his will, however, thus making Octavian heir to the throne on his death.

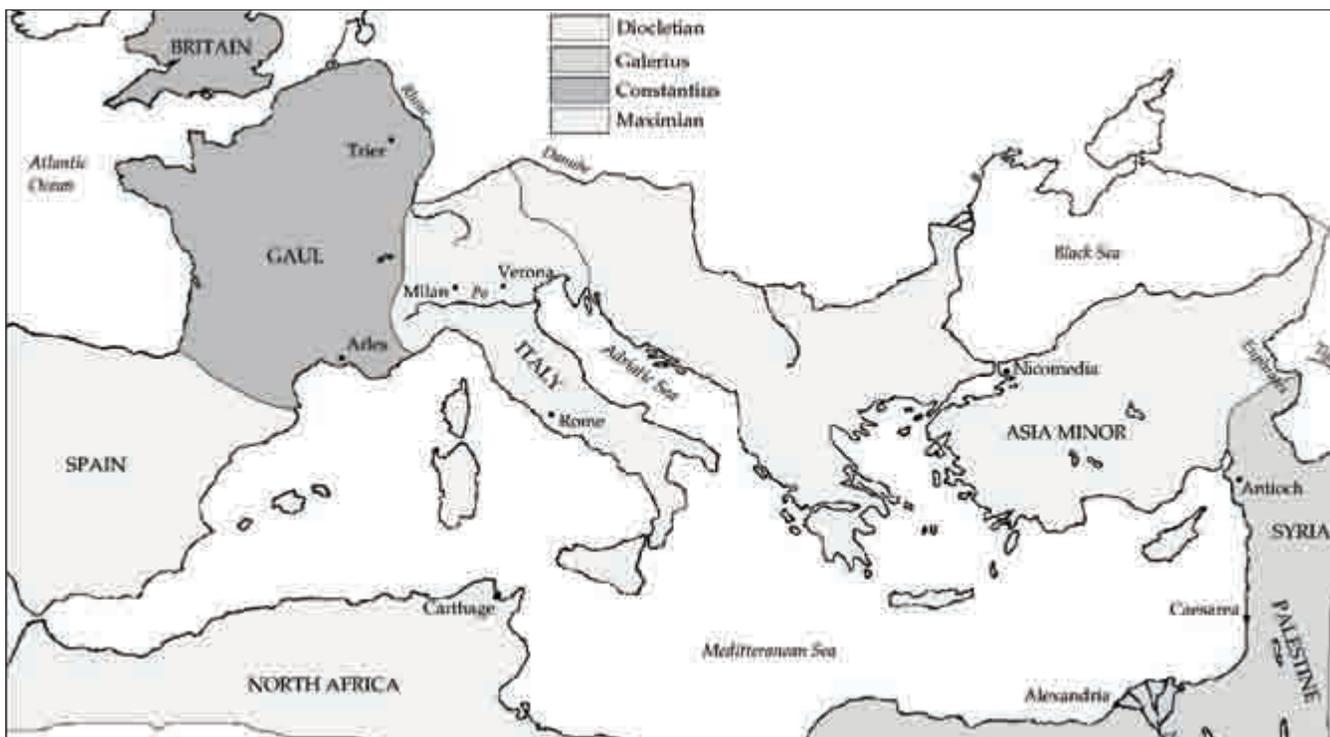
After Julius Caesar was assassinated in 44 B.C., Octavian immediately took the family name *Caesar* as his own. In 27 B.C. the Roman Senate bestowed on him the additional honorific name *Augustus*—“the Exalted” (from the Latin *augere*, “to increase”)—thereby making him Augustus Caesar, by which name he is commonly known. Roman emperors after Octavian bore the title “Augustus” as a matter of course. Later, the Roman Emperor Hadrian (117–138) initiated the

custom of using the title Caesar to designate the heir to the throne, the one who would one day take the name Augustus.

Following this custom, in 285 Diocletian gave the title Caesar to Maximian, an officer in his army. Although Maximian was technically only heir to the throne and therefore subordinate to him, Diocletian divided the empire between them. He ruled the East, Maximian the West.

Flavius Constantius was a military officer under Maximian’s command who played an important role in securing the borders of the Empire along the Rhine and Danube Rivers. By 289, he had worked his way up to prefect of Maximian’s praetorian guard in Gaul (modern-day France). That put him in an ideal position to benefit from Diocletian’s next major innovation.

In 293 Diocletian divided the Empire into four parts. Although he retained the title of Augustus for himself, along with senior authority over the whole Empire, he also bestowed on Maximian the same title, but with lesser authority than his own. He then appointed Galerius Maximianus and Flavius Constantius as *caesari*, heir to the two *augusti*—himself



THE ROMAN EMPIRE A.D. 293: To ensure the safety and prosperity of the Roman Empire, Diocletian

established the tetrarchy. This division of the Empire into four realms held for nearly 20 years.

and Maximian. The two *augusti* even went so far as to formally adopt the two *caesari*.

In addition, Diocletian gave his daughter, Valeria, in marriage to Galerius, while Maximian gave his daughter, Theodora, to Constantius. For this honor, however, Constantius was required to divorce his wife, Helena, with whom he already had a son, Constantine. With his father's adoption, Constantine, who was 20 or 21 at this time, became an eligible candidate to succeed his father and so was brought to the court of Diocletian for training and education. This arrangement served another purpose as well. By keeping Constantine close by, Diocletian was able to ensure Constantius' allegiance.

Under the new arrangement, the four members of the newly-formed imperial college resided in the territories they ruled. Diocletian lived primarily in Nicomedia, and governed the largest of the territories—Asia Minor and the Balkan Peninsula west to northern Italy. Maximian held court in Milan, governing Italy, North Africa and Spain. Galerius governed Syria, Palestine and Egypt from Antioch. Constantius resided in Trier, ruling Gaul and Britain. (See map, p. 20)

As the senior member of the imperial college, Diocletian reserved the sole right of decree for the entire Empire. Junior members of the college were allowed the right to decree within their own territory as they saw fit; however, they were expected to enforce Diocletian's decrees as well. This was a major change in the Roman imperial government and greatly diminished the influence of the Roman Senate. As long as the Empire was governed from Rome, the decrees of the emperor were subject to ratification by the Roman Senate. Following Diocletian's changes, the right of decree was virtually unchecked. Each emperor had a full entourage of advisors living at his court. Consequently, when decisions were made, the Roman Senate was not consulted.

Roman citizens were accustomed to trusting the wisdom and benevolence of the emperor. Political fiction held the emperor's chief concern was always the welfare of the Roman people. It was normal for emperors to bolster that fiction

by claiming the patronage of the gods and divine guidance. Therefore, Diocletian claimed the patronage of the chief god of the Roman pantheon, Jupiter; Maximian, that of Hercules; Constantius, that of Apollo.

The tutelage of the gods was meant to convey to the people that the gods were in complete control. Under Diocletian, the people had reason to believe they were. He restored the Empire to its former glory. There was peace on all fronts. Cities abandoned during the barbarian invasions were repopulated.

However, not all Roman citizens enjoyed the benefits of peace. The large armies required to defend the borders of the Empire required equally large taxes to maintain. Moreover, with the exception of Constantius, the emperors took full advantage of their "divine" right. They took the best of the produce from the countryside to supply the court. Diocletian endeavored to build Nicomedia into a city of splendor equal to Rome, thereby consuming even more scarce resources. Before long, Diocletian, Galerius and Maximian were looked upon as tyrants.

The relationship between the emperors was not altogether harmonious either. Diocletian knew he would be able to remain the senior member of the college only so long as he held some leverage over the others. However, the others were constantly seeking to gain the upper hand. Before long, Galerius came out on top.

By 296, Persia had taken parts of Syria and Asia Minor from Galerius. As a result, he requested Diocletian's aid, and together they marched against the Persians. The Persians withdrew from the occupied territory, but only after defeating Galerius and Diocletian in the battle, a defeat for which Diocletian blamed Galerius. However, he could do little at that time to settle accounts with Galerius. Immediately thereafter he found it necessary to quell a rebellion in Egypt and had to remain there for the next year and a half. In 298, with Diocletian still in Egypt, Galerius executed a daring attack on the Persians and recovered all the territory the Persians had taken, and more. By the time Diocletian returned from Egypt, Galerius was widely acclaimed for his victory.

Six years later, Diocletian became ill. By the spring of 305, he was extremely debilitated, and Galerius used his acclaim as a military leader to persuade both Diocletian and Maximian, the other Augustus, to step down. He and Constantius then became the new *augusti* (Galerius, of course, the senior of the two). Since two *caesari* needed to be appointed, it was assumed Diocletian would name Constantine, the son of Constantius, and Maxentius, the son of Maximian. However, since neither of these two were loyal to Galerius, Galerius could not depend on them to comply with his decrees. Therefore, he made sure Diocletian appointed two others—Severus, an officer in Galerius' army, and Maximinus, Galerius' nephew. Galerius then took control of Diocletian's territories, giving his own to Maximinus. Severus was allowed Italy and North Africa, while Constantius added Spain to his former domain of Gaul and Britain.

The Rise of Constantine, A.D. 305–313

Following the realignment of the imperial college in 305, Constantine joined his father, Constantius, in the West. The following year his father died, and Constantine assumed the throne. His troops proclaimed him Augustus, as his father had been. Galerius, however, only grudgingly recognized Constantine, and then only as Caesar. Constantine accepted the lesser title for the short term, knowing that opportunity for advancement would come in time. It came the following year.

Maxentius, the son of the retired Augustus, Maximian, had also been passed over in 305. But a year later he wrested the city of Rome from Severus and proclaimed himself emperor of Italy and North Africa. He restored his father to his former position as Augustus, and together they defeated Severus, scattering his army and taking Severus himself to Rome, where they either killed him or forced him to commit suicide.

Maximian and Maxentius expected Galerius to retaliate immediately from the East. Needing to ensure Constantine

would not also attack from the West, Maximian offered to recognize Constantine as an equal, as Augustus, and also offered his daughter Fausta, Maxentius' sister, to confirm the agreement. Constantine accepted the offer, leaving Maximian and Maxentius free to concentrate on Galerius. Therefore, when Galerius marched against Rome, he discovered better defenses than he expected. Rather than risk defeat, he negotiated a tentative peace and retreated.

Galerius once again renewed his acceptance of Constantine as a member of the imperial college in 308, but still only as Caesar. He also appointed one of his subordinates, Licinius, to replace Severus as the other Augustus. Thus he reinstated the tetrarchy with himself and Licinius as *augusti*, Constantine and Maximinus as *caesari*. However, Maximinus was unwilling to accept the newcomer Licinius as his superior. Therefore, Galerius named Maximinus and Constantine *sons of augusti*. Thereafter, all four members of the imperial college were *augusti*.

Maximian, who had been Augustus with Diocletian years before, still craved his former station and power. Consequently, in 308 he sought to overthrow his son, Maxentius. When he failed to win the support of the army, however, he fled Rome to live in Gaul with his son-in-law, Constantine.

In 310 Maximian attempted a similar intrigue against Constantine. He first persuaded Constantine to take only part of the army into the northern provinces to stop an invasion of the Franks. He then staged a coup, intending to use the troops Constantine left behind to defend his hold on power. His coup attempt failed, however, because most of the army and the members of the court were unwilling to go along. Maximian hung himself.

Although the coup failed, some army officers and members of the court had supported Maximian. Consequently, Constantine realized he had to firmly establish the legitimacy of his office. So, in order to validate his reign, he took the patronage of Apollo, the god of his father. He also arranged to have a public speech given, in which the orator declared that Apollo approved of Constantine's succession to the throne of his father. During that speech, the orator also attributed

to Constantine an apparently fictitious vision in which Apollo promised him a long life and offered him laurel crowns to signify the years of his success. This becomes significant because, two years later, Constantine himself reported a similar vision and a dream which Christian bishops said came from Jesus Christ.

One can see from the public speech concerning Apollo's patronage that Constantine was clearly not above using the religious beliefs of his pagan subjects to gain political advantage. He knew the people would appreciate his adherence to religious tradition and thereby accept his succession as legitimate. The worship of Apollo was monotheistic at that time, and Constantine probably also knew Christians would at least appreciate his monotheism. Coins dating from that time bore the image of Constantine with the inscription *soli invicto comiti* (to the unconquered sun my companion). It is interesting to note that Constantine allowed these "pagan" coins to circulate for some years after his "conversion" to Christianity.

After the realignment of the imperial college in 308, Licinius—the newly appointed Augustus—waited for an opportunity to regain control of the territories Maxentius had taken from Severus. Licinius knew that would not be an easy task. Maxentius kept his army as strong and well-provisioned as possible. The

heavy taxes levied for this purpose did little to endear him to his subjects, however. He was considered a tyrant.

Licinius' opportunity came when Galerius died in 311. That created a vacuum of power in which Constantine, Licinius, Maximinus and the rebel Maxentius each set out to gain the upper hand. On hearing the news of Galerius' death, Maximinus immediately annexed Asia Minor, which was the territory Galerius had ruled. Licinius had more than ample reason to suspect his territory would be next on Maximinus' list.

Fearing that Maximinus' action might lead to Licinius seeking an alliance with Maxentius, Constantine offered Licinius his sister's hand in marriage. Licinius accepted. His alliance with Licinius accomplished exactly what Constantine hoped it would. It allowed Licinius to focus his full attention on dealing with Maximinus. It also left Constantine free to march against Maxentius without fear of intervention.

Constantine wasted little time. He invaded northern Italy in 312, completely surprising Maxentius, who had been expecting Licinius to attack from the east. After suffering defeat in Verona, Maxentius' forces withdrew to Rome, where they prepared for a siege. Constantine methodically marched down the Italian peninsula, "liberating" the people from the "tyrant" and gaining their allegiance as he went.

On the march toward Rome, Constantine and his army reportedly saw a vision of a fiery cross in the sky. Later, Constantine claimed to have had a dream in which someone presented him with the same sign and told him "by this conquer." The Christian bishops in his entourage told him the person in his dream was Jesus Christ. They also told him God was going to grant him victory over the pagan tyrant, Maxentius. Constantine immediately equipped his army with the sign (see inset), and engaged Maxentius' forces on October 28, 312.

During the ensuing Battle of the Milvian Bridge, Maxentius was thrown from his horse and drowned in the Tiber River. Constantine entered Rome in triumph, "liberating" the Roman people from the "tyrant." He thereby became the first "Christian" emperor of the Roman Empire. According to the church histo-



The Greek letters "chi" and "rho," the first two letters of the name "Christ," make up the *labarum*, the "sign" under which Constantine marched against Maxentius on October 28, A.D. 312. This was the symbol Constantine reportedly saw in a vision when he was told "by this conquer."

rian, Eusebius, he humbly attributed his victory to the providence of God:

But he, according to the piety deeply implanted in him, neither exulting in the shouts that were raised, nor elated by the plaudits bestowed upon him, well perceiving the assistance which he had received from God, immediately commanded a trophy of the Saviour's passion to be placed in the hand of his own statue. And when they had erected his statue, thus holding the salutary sign of the cross in his right hand, in the most public place at Rome, he commanded the following inscription to be written, in the Roman tongue, as follows: "By this salutary sign, the true ornament of bravery, I have saved I your city, liberated from the yoke of the tyrant."

(Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, Book IX, Chap. IX, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993, pp. 393-394.)

The following spring, Licinius defeated Maximinus and gained control of the eastern half of the Roman Empire. He and Constantine met later that year in Milan to celebrate their victories and begin their reigns together.

Developments in the Church, A.D. 261-313

No study of the "Christian" Emperor Constantine would be complete without an explanation of developments in the Church at that time. A full account could fill several volumes. Hence, the following explanation will be cursory at best.

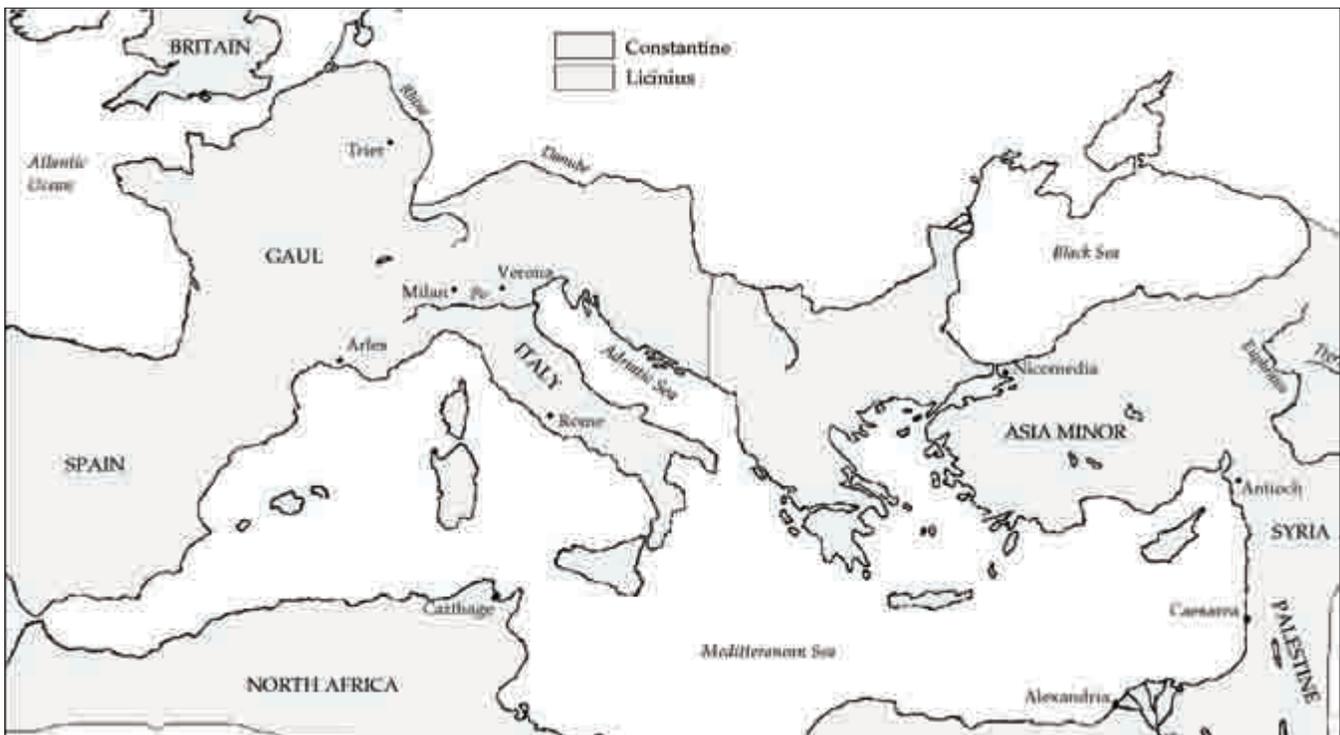
In 261, Emperor Gallienus issued the Edict of Toleration, which ended the persecution of Christians that his father, Valerian, had instituted three years earlier. The edict restored all property seized and permitted the Church to conduct affairs without further molestation from the State. As a result, the Church experienced phenomenal growth and prosperity over the next 40 years.

Freed from the threat of persecution, Christianity became a much more attractive religion to Romans at all levels of society. The attraction was so great that the aristocracy, which had shunned the Church in the centuries before, saw increasing numbers become "Christian." These aristocratic Pretenders made Christianity an even more acceptable religious alternative to others, especially to members of the Roman government.

Consequently, the "Christians" in their ranks increased dramatically. There were Christian governors, Christian senators, even Christians in the households of the emperors. A local church of considerable size assembled within view of the palace of Diocletian in his capital of Nicomedia. Diocletian's wife and many of his servants attended.

Between 260 and 300, the Christian clergy became an exceptionally well-defined governing body. The bishops of the large urban centers, such as Carthage, Antioch, Alexandria, and Rome, exercised stringent ecclesiastical control over the churches in their regions. But these urban bishops not only controlled ecclesiastical matters, they also commended the policies of the secular government from the pulpit, thereby gaining favor with provincial governors.

The size of the clergy also increased dramatically. Offices were added for every imaginable function. Acolytes attended to the bishops, while sub-deacons assisted the deacons. Readers kept the sacred books, presenters led the music and doorkeepers admitted the faithful. Janitors and sextons maintained Church property inside and out. The



THE ROMAN EMPIRE A.D. 313: With the death of Galerius and the defeat of Maxentius and Maximinus, the tetrarchy established by Diocletian came to an end.

For more than a decade, Constantine ruled the West and Licinius the East. Then, in A.D. 324, Constantine became sole emperor.

Church changed drastically, becoming bigger, more institutional, more visible and much more acceptable to pagans.

However, the four decades of peace and prosperity the Church had experienced ended abruptly in 303. That year Diocletian initiated one of the greatest persecutions Christianity has ever known. Eusebius, the well-known Church historian and bishop of the Church at Caesarea from 313 until his death in 339, viewed the persecution as the judgment of God falling on a corrupt and sinful Church. He describes the conditions that existed in the Church prior to the persecution as follows:

But when, by reason of excessive liberty, we sunk into negligence and sloth, one envying and reviling another in different ways, and we were almost, as it were, on the point of taking up arms against each other, and were assailing each other with words as with darts and spears, prelates inveighing against prelates, and people rising up against people, and hypocrisy and dissimulation had arisen to the greatest height of malignity, then the divine judgment, which usually proceeds with a lenient hand, whilst the multitudes were yet crowding into the church, with gentle and mild visitations began to afflict its episcopacy; the persecution having begun with those brethren that were in the army. But, as if destitute of all sensibility, we were not prompt in measures to appease and propitiate the Deity; some, indeed, like atheists, regarding our situation as unheeded and unobserved by a providence, we added one wickedness and misery to another. But some that appeared to be our pastors, deserting the law of piety, were inflamed against

each other with mutual strifes, only accumulating quarrels and threats, rivalry, hostility and hatred to each other, only anxious to assert the government as a kind of sovereignty for themselves.

(Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, Book VIII, Chap. I, p. 318.)

Those circumstances are directly attributable to the fact that Pretenders like Cyprian had previously opened the doors of the Church to any and all comers. Then the clergy developed the ignorant practice of penance to make it easier for Pretenders to maintain their pretense. (See "Puritans and Pretenders: Cyprian, Novatian, and the Lapsed," *The Voice of Elijah*, January 1994.) When that happened, the Church became nothing more than it is today—a social gathering with little to distinguish it from any other social gathering. Pretenders of all stripe used the Church to further their own agenda rather than the purpose for which Christ had established His Church.

The events leading up to this persecution were as follows: In 299, Diocletian demanded that all the members of the court and the army offer sacrifice to the gods on his behalf. Some Christians refused and were dismissed. Diocletian would have most likely stopped there had it not been for Galerius. Galerius hated Christians and wanted to see them eradicated from the Empire. So, in 303, he persuaded Diocletian to issue an edict demanding every church be destroyed and all Christian writings be burned. That was followed immediately by another edict:

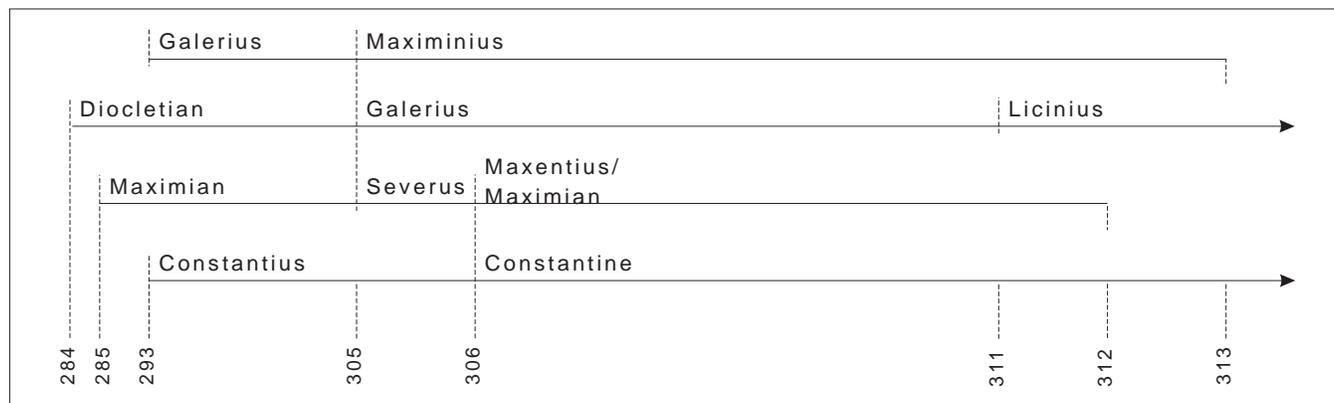
Next day an edict was published, depriving the Christians of all honours

and dignities; ordaining also that, without any distinction of rank or degree, they should be subjected to tortures, and that every suit at law should be received against them; while, on the other hand, they were debarred from being plaintiffs in questions of wrong, adultery, or theft; and, finally, that they should neither be capable of freedom, nor have right of suffrage.

(Lactantius, "Of the Manner in Which the Persecutors Died," Chap. XIII, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. VII, A. Roberts & J. Donaldson, eds., 1867, pp. 305–306.)

Later that same year Diocletian ordered the arrest and imprisonment of all Church leaders. The year after that, he decreed that all who refused to sacrifice to the gods were to be executed. He fully expected the other three members of the imperial college to enforce his decrees, and Maximian and Galerius followed his lead. Constantius, however, destroyed only a few churches in Gaul and Britain. No Christians were executed in his portion of the Empire, possibly because Constantius recognized Christians comprised a fairly sizeable number of his subjects.

The Great Persecution did not end as abruptly as it had begun. When Constantine succeeded his father in July of 306, he rescinded Diocletian's edicts of persecution his father had enforced in Gaul and Britain. He also contributed imperial funds to rebuild destroyed churches. These actions endeared him to the Christians but, more importantly, they reveal his attitude toward religion in general. He recognized its importance to some members of society and was willing to use that to his political advantage.



The persecution of Christians in Italy and North Africa ended in 306, when Maxentius defeated Severus. However, Maxentius did not immediately restore confiscated properties or rebuild what had been destroyed. He eventually decreed the restoration of confiscated properties in 311, in an apparent effort to improve his relations with the Church. But even this decree was not enforced in North Africa. Only later, when Constantine triumphed over Maxentius, was all Church property restored and money to rebuild contributed from the imperial treasuries.

After Licinius defeated Maximinus in 313, he joined Constantine in Milan and together they issued the Edict of Milan, which ended persecution of Christians throughout the Empire. That Edict read as follows:

“When we, Constantine and Licinius, emperors, had an interview at Milan, and conferred together with respect to the good and security of the commonweal, it seemed to us that, amongst those things that are profitable to mankind in general, the reverence paid to the Divinity merited our first and chief attention, and that it was proper that the Christians and all others should have liberty to follow that mode of religion which to each of them appeared best; so that that God, who is seated in heaven, might be benign and propitious to us, and to every one under our government. And therefore we judged it a salutary measure, and one highly consonant to right reason, that no man should be denied leave of attaching himself to the rites of the Christians, or to whatever other religion his mind directed him, that thus the supreme Divinity, to whose worship we freely devote ourselves, might continue to vouchsafe His favour and beneficence to us.”

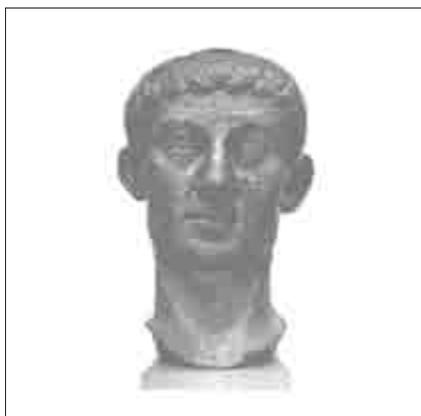
(Ibid., Chap. XLVIII, p. 320.)

Constantine was responsible for most of the wording of this edict. That fact is illuminating. Although he proclaimed freedom of worship throughout the Empire, he did so intending to “convert” the whole Empire to Christianity.

Constantine and the Donatist Schism

Diocletian’s persecution had much the same effect as the persecution Decius instituted in 250. Both raised the issue of how to deal with those who lapsed. Decius’ persecution produced the knotty problem of what to do about the *libellitici*—those who obtained a certificate stating they had sacrificed to the gods when in fact they had not done so. (See “Puritans and Pretenders: Cyprian, Novatian, and the Lapsed,” *The Voice of Elijah*, January 1994.) Diocletian’s ended with a controversy over how to treat those—primarily clergy—who relinquished sacred writings to be burned. These were called *traditores* because they “handed over” (*traditio*) the writings of the Church.

The problem of how to deal with the *traditores* arose because Maxentius halted the persecution in North Africa and Italy after he defeated Severus in 306. That was six years before Constantine defeated Maxentius. Therefore, by the time Constantine began meddling in Church affairs after his “conversion,” many of those who had lapsed, clergy among them, had already been readmitted to the Church. This readmission of the lapsed produced a well-defined schism between moderate members of the Church and a smaller group of fervent Christians known as the Donatists.



Caius Flavius Valerius Aurelius Constantinus Magnus became the sole emperor of the Roman Empire in A.D. 324. Commonly known as Constantine I or Constantine the Great, he was the first “Christian” emperor in history. His policies led to the “Christianizing” of the West.

During the persecution the Donatists held tenaciously to their profession of faith. They zealously sought martyrdom, finding it far more attractive than denial of Christ. After the persecution, these zealots would not even consider fellowship with those who lapsed, no matter what the circumstances. Yet the more moderate leaders of the Church advocated leniency, just as the Pretender Cyprian had done half a century earlier. Thus the stage was set for the Donatist schism.

The Donatists insisted the holiness of the Church depended upon the holiness of its individual members. They held that if known transgressors were permitted to return to fellowship with True Believers, the Church ceased to be God’s Church. Therefore, they believed that they, as members of the Church, were responsible to maintain their own holiness before God and to protect the holiness of the Church. One way they did so was by excommunicating Pretenders who, although they claimed to be regenerate, demonstrated otherwise by their actions. The Donatists contended their beliefs applied specifically to the lapsed, arguing that, if one of the *traditores* regained his former office in the Church, not only was his reinstatement invalid, any sacrament or ordination performed by him was equally invalid.

Although the disagreement centered on whether the bishop of Carthage was legitimately ordained, the issue actually dealt with the Donatists’ views regarding the holiness of the Church. It happened this way. In 311, when the bishop of Carthage died, moderate Church leaders held a council and elected Caecilian bishop. They did not invite Donatist bishops to the council, however, so the Donatists held a council of their own. They claimed the ordination of Caecilian was invalid because Felix of Aptunga, the bishop who performed the ordination, was a *traditore*. Consequently, they ordained Majorinus as bishop of Carthage instead. Soon the churches throughout North Africa were split over the issue of which group represented the true Church.

After Constantine came to power in Rome, he sent funds to rebuild North African churches. When he designated Caecilian, who had been recognized as

bishop of Carthage by the Roman Church, to disperse the funds, he tacitly recognized Caecilian as the representative of the true Church. In light of his later actions, it is doubtful he was unaware of the issues involved in the Donatist schism when he did this.

As Constantine most likely expected, the Donatists protested his recognition of Caecilian as bishop of Carthage. In 313, they petitioned him to appoint bishops from the Church in Gaul to arbitrate their case. Since the Gallic church had suffered the loss of only a few church buildings during the persecution, they deemed the Gallic bishops as the most capable of impartial judgment. Constantine complied with their request, but not in the way the Donatist leaders envisioned. He appointed three bishops from Gaul to judge the case, but he held the hearing in Rome, with Miltiades, the bishop of Rome, presiding. Miltiades, in turn, invited fifteen Italian bishops to attend, thus transforming the hearing into a council with the full authority of the Roman Church.

It is obvious Constantine had already determined how he wanted the council to decide. The theological issues at the heart of the Donatist schism were unimportant to him. His new Christian Empire required a unified Church to exhibit Christian harmony to the pagans. Therefore, he wanted “to leave no room for schism or division.” He informed Miltiades of his expectations:

“... your gravity will read and consider in what way the aforesaid cause may be most accurately investigated and justly decided. Since it neither escapes your diligence, that I show such regard for the holy catholic church, that I wish you, upon the whole, to leave no room for schism or division. May the power of the great God preserve you many years, most esteemed.”

(Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, Book X, Chap. V, pp. 429–430.)

The council convened in Rome in 313. Constantine not only provided the facilities for the meeting, he also provided transportation for all attendees. Throughout the proceedings, the Donatists relied on the oratorical skill of Donatus, the man after whom the sect

was named, to argue their case. In spite of Donatus’ great oratory, the council ruled against the Donatists in compliance with Constantine’s wishes. The bishops held Caecilian’s ordination to be valid. However, they did not censure the Donatists because they sought complete reconciliation.

Moderate Church leaders proposed that all Donatist bishops keep their offices in the North African Church, except where a Donatist bishop and Catholic bishop occupied the same seat. They proposed that, in those cases, the senior bishop would keep his office, while the junior would relocate. This did not appease the Donatists, however. They appealed to Constantine again, claiming additional evidence needed consideration.

Constantine patiently indulged them. The following year (314), he convened a council in Arles. Once again he provided transportation and lodging for all attendees. By this time Constantine firmly believed it was his responsibility to bring the schism to an end, so he attended the council himself. His greeting reveals how he viewed his role as “Christian” emperor:

Constantine Augustus to the Catholic Bishops, his dearest Brothers, greetings. The ever-loyal and incomprehensible faithfulness of our God does not in any way allow human nature to wander unduly long in darkness, nor does it suffer the hateful dispositions of some people to prevail so far as not to grant by at last opening to them through its most splendid light the word to salvation, that they return to the rule of righteousness. In fact, I know this by many examples, I make this same conclusion from my own case. For at first there were in me things which seemed to lack righteousness, and I did not think that a power above saw any thought which I was harbouring in the secret places of my heart. Honestly, what fortune should these thoughts, being such as I have mentioned, have received? Surely, one abounding with every calamity. But Almighty God, sitting on high, has granted me what I did not deserve. Certainly, now the blessings which he has granted in His heavenly kindness to me, His servant, cannot be told or counted, most holy Bishops of

Christ the Saviour, dearest Brothers. (Optatus, “Constantine to the Bishops at the Council of Arles,” Imperial Rome and the Christians, Vol. II, Keresztes, Paul, New York: Univ. Press of America, 1989, p. 318.)

The second council also ruled in favor of Caecilian. So the Donatists gave up seeking a fair decision from a Church council and asked Constantine directly for a decision. Therefore, he sent a small commission into North Africa to investigate the charges against Felix of Aptunga. The commission decided the charges against Felix were unfounded and held, therefore, that Caecilian’s ordination was valid. The Donatists rejected that ruling as well, but this time the Donatist population in Carthage began to riot.

Constantine suddenly found he had a definite problem. He believed—because Christian bishops had told him so—that he occupied his imperial throne by God’s design. Therefore, he felt obligated to meddle in Church affairs whenever it seemed necessary. As he put it, his primary responsibility was to “dissipate errors and banish rash opinions.” By 315, however, he had exhausted the remedy he sought through mediation. So now it was time for him to intervene in the way he knew best. If diplomacy failed, he would use force. He wrote the following to explain his intentions:

*But after you read the letter, make it plain to both Caecilian and to them as well that when by the favour of Divine Love I come to Africa, I shall most fully demonstrate, by pronouncing a clear judgment, to all, both Caecilian and those who appear to oppose him, what kind of veneration is to be rendered to the Highest God and what sort of worship appears to please Him. Moreover, I will, by employing careful examination, learn to the fullest extent, and bring to light, things which some, misled by their ignorance of mind, now, fancy they can keep in the dark. **Those persons who are the cause of this situation and bring it about that the Supreme God is not being worshipped with the reverence that is His due, I shall destroy and disperse.** And since it is obvious enough that nobody can gain the beatitudes of martyr-*

dom if he is one of that brood which seem to be alienated and divorced from the truth of religion, I shall without any hesitation cause those whom I judge hostile to the Divine Law and religion itself, and find guilty of violence against the proper worship, to pay with their destruction they deserve for their madness and reckless obstinacy. ... I am going to make plain to them what kind of worship is to be offered to the Divinity. For I believe that I can in no other way escape a most serious guilt than by absolutely refusing to connive at this wickedness. What more important business is there for me to do in virtue of my policy and Imperial office than to dissipate errors and banish rash opinions and so ensure that all offer Almighty God true religion, guileless concord and due worship?
 (Optatus, "App.," Chap. VII, p. 322.)

However, Constantine could not make the trip to North Africa as planned. Instead, he sent troops to confiscate Donatist churches and exile their leaders. Some Donatists were killed. However, even this action did not remedy the schism. The Donatists refused to succumb to force. Constantine discovered to his great chagrin—as the Antichrist will at the End—it is sometimes difficult to deal with people who firmly believe something to be true.

But Constantine had his limits. His campaign for Christian unity ended when his relationship with Licinius soured. That occurred because Licinius initiated a

persecution of Christians in the eastern half of the Empire. If Constantine, the champion of Christianity, planned to liberate oppressed Christians in the East, he could hardly continue his repression of Donatist Christians in the West. So six years later, in 321, he restored Donatist churches and recalled their bishops from exile. The Donatist Church remained a strong influence in North Africa well into the next century.

Conclusion

Constantine's "conversion" to Christianity occurred on his march down the Italian peninsula to Rome after he saw a sign in a vision and had a dream in which he saw the same sign and was told "by this conquer." "Christian" bishops told him Jesus Christ had given him both the dream and the vision. A logical question to ask is, "How did they know that?" The answer to that question is, "They did not."

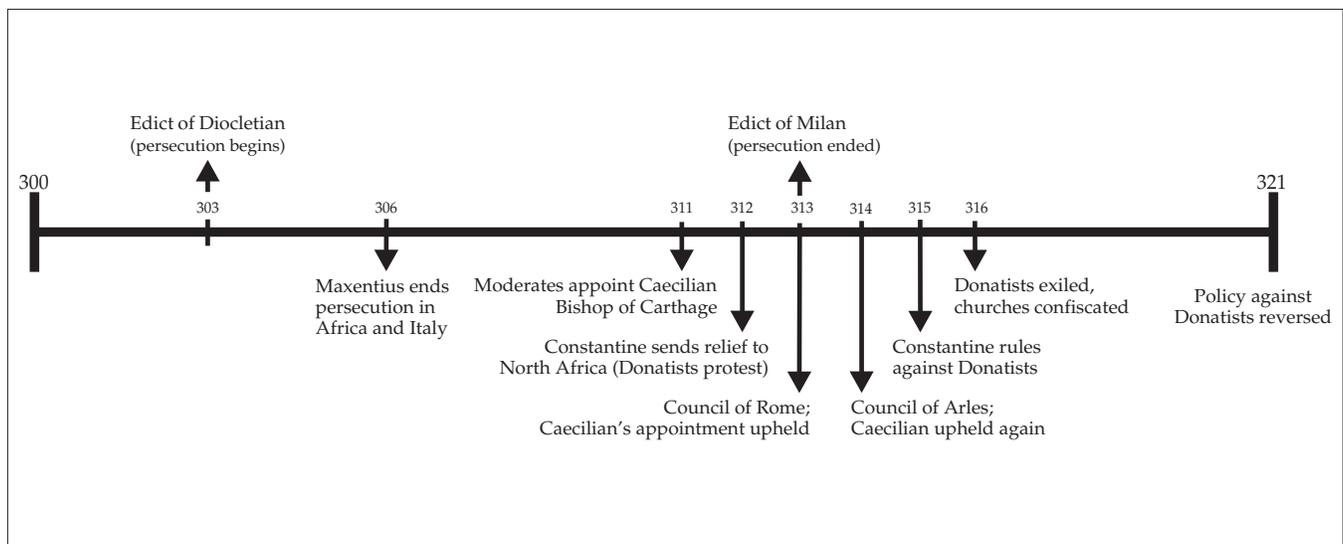
You see, one insurmountable danger faces those who readily accept every supernatural event as having its origin in God. What if God did not give the "sign"? What if He allowed the father of all lies to do what he does best? What if God allowed Satan to pose as God and give a "lying sign"? Unless you want to make a liar out of the Apostle Paul, you must at least admit "lying signs" are possible:

And then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; [that is], the one whose coming is in

accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. And for this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they might believe what is false, in order that all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness.
 (2 Thessalonians 2:8–12)

That passage presents an interesting set of questions for the inquiring mind to ponder: What if God, for His Own purposes, intentionally allowed Satan to mislead the Pretenders who occupied leadership roles in the Church after the Church lost *The Apostolic Teaching*? What if the Roman Catholic Church, with all its suppression, distortion, and outright loss of Truth, was the direct result of God's wrath? What if the claim expressed by some Protestant Reformers is actually true? What if Constantine, the first "Christian" emperor was nothing more than Satan's patsy? What if his vision and dream were just "lying signs"?

Some folks naïvely believe Constantine had a great, long-lasting, positive effect on the Church. They will readily tell you he freed the Church from persecution and ridicule, raising it to great power and glory. To their way of thinking, that was a good thing. After all, Christianity went on to become the chief religion of western culture. What more could any good "Christian" desire? Not surprisingly, these mindless parrots are



echoing the sentiments voiced by “Christian” leaders in Constantine’s time:

Thus, then, after all the tyranny had been purged away, the empire was justly reserved firm and without a rival, to Constantine and his sons. Who first sweeping away that enmity to God, exhibited by the former rulers, sensible of the mercies conferred upon them by God, exhibited also their own love of religion and God, with their piety and gratitude to Him, by those works and operations which they presented to the view of all the world.

(Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, Book X, Chap. IX, p. 439.)

Behold, all the adversaries are destroyed, and tranquillity having been re-established throughout the Roman empire, the late oppressed Church arises again, and the temple of God, overthrown by the hands of the wicked, is built with more glory than before. For God has raised up princes to rescind the impious and sanguinary edicts of the tyrants and provide for the welfare of mankind; so that now the cloud of past times is dispelled, and peace and serenity gladden all hearts.

(Lactantius, “Of the Manner in Which the Persecutors Died,” Chap. I, p. 301.)

An unbiased person could easily see Constantine slightly differently. He was certainly somewhat less than the perfect “Christian.” At the very least, he exhibited a shrewd political sense of how to capitalize on every available opportunity in his quest for power. He was not always concerned about who got hurt in the process. A modern historian describes his character this way:

... a lust for power, a strong element of cruelty, a capacity for quick thinking and acting, and a religious sense which allowed him to attribute his success to the intervention of higher powers.

(Frend, W.H.C., The Early Church From the Beginnings to 461, London: SCM Press Ltd., 1986, p. 120.)

Constantine’s “religious sense” was apparently his most acute. He could use either a pagan religion, as he did with

the vision Apollo supposedly granted him, or the Christian religion, as he did with his vision of the Cross of Christ. It does appear, however, that he convinced himself his “conversion” to Christianity was genuine. That was undoubtedly not the case, but his was certainly as genuine as that of the many Pretenders in the Church in his day, or, for that matter, in our own.

Constantine may have actually believed God was directing his efforts. That does not mean True Believers should uncritically accept his own assessment of the situation. After all, Pretenders don’t know that they don’t know. (And what a lot there is that they don’t know!) If Constantine was a Pretender, he wouldn’t have known he was. Therefore, one has to look not just at what he said but also at what he did before coming to a conclusion.

Constantine made the Church an arm of the State, something God had never intended it to be. Beyond that, he more or less appointed himself head of the Church, something for which he was totally unqualified. His attitude toward the Church can be seen in his reference to his “ministry” in this letter ordering the rebuilding of the churches:

Since tyranny has by its unholy council, until now, persecuted the servants of God the Saviour, I am fully satisfied and convinced, my dear Brother, that the buildings belonging to all the churches either became dilapidated through indifference, or, through fear of the constant threat of violence, received less attention than they should. But now that liberty is given back, and that that dragon is, by the providence of the Great God and through my ministry, driven out of the administration of public affairs, I believe that the power of God has become evident to all, and that those who, through fear or unbelief, embraced some errors recognize the true God, and will come to the true and right state of life.

(Eusebius, “Vita Constantini II,” 46, Imperial Rome and the Christians, Vol. II, pp. 335–336.)

While a lot of Christians have ignorantly accepted Constantine’s own view of God’s purpose in his “Christianizing”

of the Roman Empire, others have viewed it as a catastrophe for Christianity. One such contrarian was Roger Williams, the zealous Separatist who confronted the leaders of the Massachusetts Bay Colony in the early 1600s. (See “Protestants All Agree on This: Somebody Laid an Egg!” *The Voice of Elijah*, January 1994.) Williams’ view of Constantine is not surprising, he was denouncing the state Church the Bay colonists had established. But it is interesting his view of the holiness required of individual Believers was also in line with that of the Donatists. He writes:

*Peace. I have often heard that History reports, and I have heard that Mr. Cotton himself hath affirmed it, that **Christianitie fell asleep in Constantines bosome**, and the laps and bosomes of those Emperours professing the name of Christ.*

*Truth. The unknowing zeale of Constantine and other Emperours, did more hurt to Christ Iesus his Crowne and Kingdome, than the raging fury of the most bloody Neroes. In the persecutions of the later, Christians were sweet and fragrant, like spice pounded and beaten in mortars: But those good Emperours, persecuting some erroneous persons, Arrius, &c. and advancing the professors of some Truths of Christ (for there was no small number of Truths lost in those times) and maintaining their Religion by the materiall Sword, I say by this means Christianity was eclipsed, and the Professors of it fell asleep, Cant. 5. **Babel or confusion was usher’d in, and by degrees the Gardens of the Churches of Saints were turned into the Wilderness of whole Nations, untill the whole World became Christian or Christendome,** Revel. 12 & 13.*

(“The Bloody Tenent,” The Complete Writings of Roger Williams, Vol III, New York: Russell & Russell Inc., 1963, p. 184.)

Did you understand what Roger Williams implied concerning God’s purpose in allowing persecution of Christians? The same purpose accounts for God allowing the coming of the

Antichrist. He fully intends to purify the Body of Christ before the End. Did you also catch Williams' statement concerning "no small number of Truths lost in those times"?

Williams accurately understood the Church had somehow gone astray from the Truth. But he and other Protestant Reformers who held that same view could never figure out when or how that happened. They placed it in the time of Constantine because they lacked sufficient evidence to place it earlier.

By the time the writings of the Early Church Fathers finally surfaced in the late 1800s, there were still Protestant Reformers trying to "restore" what the Church had lost. (See "Protestants All Agree on This: Somebody Laid an Egg!" *The Voice of Elijah*, January 1994.) But these Reformers were no longer, like Williams, looking at the literature of the Early Church. They were increasingly looking for "Truth" in some mystical experience.

Roger Williams not only saw through Constantine's "conversion," he also correctly saw in Constantine a test for the Church, a test that the Church failed miserably:

Peace. I must needs acknowledge that the poor servants of Christ, for some hundredth of years after the departure of the Lord enjoyed no other power, no other Sword nor shield but spirituall, until it pleased the Lord to try his children with Liberty and ease under Constantine (a soarer Tryall then befell them in 300 years persecution) under which temporall protection, munificence and bounty of Constantine, together with his temporall Sword, drawne out against her spirituall enemies, the Church of Christ soon surfeited of the too much honey of wordly ease, authority, profit, pleasure, & c.

(Williams, "The Bloody Tenent Yet More Bloody," Complete Writings, Vol. IV, p. 384.)

Williams accurately understood Satan used Constantine to craft the notion of a state Church in which unity must be imposed at the expense of Truth. He specifically condemned Constantine's use of force against the Donatists:

Truth. Sweet Peace, the sword of Civill power was Gods sword committed by Gods most wise Providence into the hands of that famous Constantine: Doubtless his warre was righteous and pious, so far as he broke the Jawes of the oppressing persecuting Lyons that devoured Christs tender Lambes and Sheepe: And famous was his Christian Edict, (wherein Licinius joyned with him) when he put forth that imperiall Christian Decree, that no mans conscience should be forced, and for his Religion (whether to the Romane Gods, or the Christian) no man should be persecuted or hunted: When Constantine broke the bounds of his owne and Gods Edict, and drawes the sword of Civill power in the suppressing of other Consciences for the establishing of the Christian, then began the great Mysterie of the Churches sleepe, the Gardens of Christ turned into the Wildernesse of Nationall Religion, and the World (under Constantines Dominion) to the most unchristian Christendome. (Ibid., Vol IV, pp. 441-442.)

Roger Williams clearly believed Constantine had a negative impact on the Church. However, he was by no means the only Protestant Reformer to come to that conclusion. A century later, John Wesley expounded exactly the same view. However, we know he gained the notion from the German historian Gottfried Arnold (1666-1714), whose view represented the firm belief of the Anabaptists. The Anabaptists could hardly hold any other view. They were adamantly in favor of the clear separation of Church and State.

Not surprisingly, Wesley puts his description of Constantine's influence in even harsher terms:

Persecution never did, never could give any lasting wound to genuine Christianity. But the greatest it ever received, the grand blow which was struck at the very root of that humble, gentle, patient love, which is the fulfilling of the Christian law, the whole essence of true religion, was struck in the fourth century by Constantine the Great, when he called himself a

Christian, and poured in a flood of riches, honours, and power upon the Christians, more especially upon the clergy ... just so, when the fear of persecution was removed, and wealth and honour attended the Christian profession, the Christians did not gradually sink, but rushed headlong into all manner of vices.

(Sermon 61 "The Mystery of Iniquity," The Works of John Wesley, Vol. 2, Sermons, II, 34-70, Albert C. Outler, ed., Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985, pp. 462-463.)

Both Roger Williams and John Wesley called for the holiness of individual Believers and the holiness of God's Church. Isn't that interesting? That corresponds to the Donatist view. Both understood there is no easier way to corrupt the holiness of God's Church than to make it easy for Pretenders to hang around. That's probably why they held such a positive view of God's purpose in allowing persecution of the Church and an equally negative view of Constantine's "Christianizing" a secular Empire. In another instance, Wesley pointed to the positive view of Constantine as an example of the "spiritual blindness" that he saw in the Church of his day:

A wonderful instance of this spiritual blindness, this total inability to discern the signs of the times mentioned in Scripture, is given us in the very celebrated work of a late, eminent writer, who supposes 'the new Jerusalem came down from heaven' when Constantine the Great called himself a Christian. I say, 'called himself Christian'; for I dare not affirm that {he was one}, any more than Peter the Great. I cannot but believe he would have come nearer the mark if he had said, that was the time when a huge cloud of infernal brimstone and smoke came up from the bottomless pit. For surely there never was a time wherein Satan gained so fatal an advantage over the church of Christ as when such a flood of riches, and honour, and power broke in upon it, particularly on the clergy.

(Ibid., Sermon 66 "The Signs of the Times," p. 529.)

The Truth is, Satan used the interpretation of “lying signs” by ignorant Christian bishops in Constantine’s day to shape the world to his liking. Through Constantine he created the mold for the “Holy Roman Empire” in which the Pope later sat in all his splendor as a “Christian” emperor over a supposedly Christian state.

But just as Constantine failed to subject the Donatists to his will, so also the monster Christian empire that sprang from the mold he made failed to snuff out the “fire” that True Believers had within them before he came along. Pretenders have been the majority in the Church since that time, but that hasn’t stopped True Believers from transferring the remnants of that “fire” from generation to generation *orally* just as God intended.

The few faint embers remaining from the “fire” True Believers held within them ignited a “wildfire” at the time of the Protestant Reformation. But the flames that have at times burned so brightly in the Protestant Church over the past centuries since the Protestant Reformation have now given way to nothing more than smoke and mirrors.

So today you can watch the farce that Christianity has become on television, twenty-four hours a day. Satan can be justifiably proud of what his offspring have accomplished in God’s Church.

True Believers, the time has come for you to wake up and smell the roses. Satan’s lies are still being propagated in the Church by liars who desperately want to believe them. That is why Pretenders all around you are willing to interpret Satan’s “lying signs” as proof that God is pleased with the Church as it is today.

You and I know better. God does not approve of the lunacy we see going on in the Church. He fully expects the one who “talks the talk” to “walk the walk.” Yet you and I know that few today do what we know God expects His children to do. Therefore, I remind you to beware of any “Christian” who likes to talk. Chances are he/she has never learned to “walk.”

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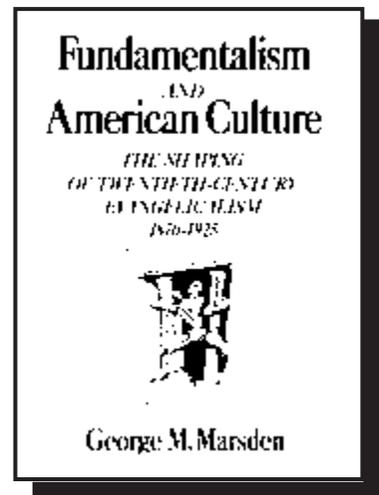
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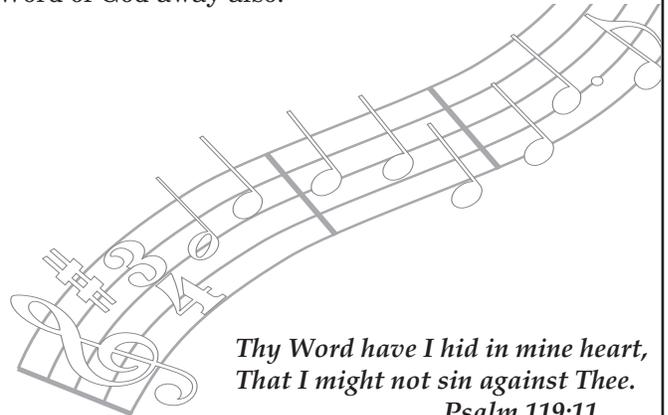
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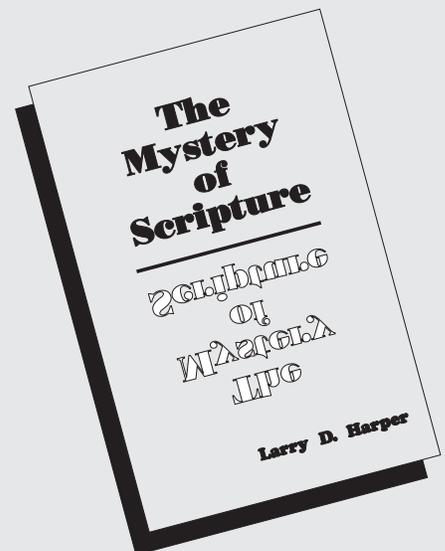
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