



Directions for Judging of Persons' Experiences

See to It

That the operation be much upon the Will or Heart, not on the Imagination, nor on the speculative understanding or motions of the mind, though they draw great affections after 'em as the consequence.

That the trouble of mind be reasonable, that the mind be troubled about those things that it has reason to be troubled about; and that the trouble seems mainly to operate in such a manner, with such a kind of trouble and exercise as is reasonable: founded on reasonable, solid consideration; a solid sense and conviction of truth, as of things as they are indeed.

That it be because their state appears terrible on the account of those things, wherein its dreadfulness indeed consists; and that their concern be solid, not operating very much by pangs and sudden passions, freaks and frights, and a capriciousness of mind.

That under their seeming convictions it be sin indeed; that they are convinced of their guilt, in offending and affronting so great a God: One that so hates sin, and is so set against it, to punish it, &c.

That they be convinced both of sins of heart and life: that their pretences of sense of sin of heart ben't without reflection on their wicked practice; and also that they are not only convinced of sin of practice, but sin of heart. And in both, that what troubles 'em be those things wherein their wretchedness has really chiefly consisted. ...

That it is truly conviction of sin that convinces them of the Justice of God in their damnation, in rejecting their prayers, disregarding their sorrowful case, and all desires and endeavours after deliverance, &c., and not merely any imagination or pang, and melting of affection through some real or supposed instance of Divine Goodness.

That they be so convinced of sin as not in the inward thought and habit of their minds to excuse themselves, and impliedly quarrel with God, because of their impotency: for instance, that they don't excuse their slight of Christ, and want of love to Him, because they can't esteem and love Him.

Continued on back cover

Continued from front cover

That they don't evidently themselves look on their convictions [as] great, and ben't taken with their own humiliation. ...

That they have not only pretended convictions of sin; but a proper mourning for sin. And also, that sin is burdensome to them, and that their hearts are tender and sensible with respect to it ... the object of their care and dread. ...

That their discoveries and illuminations and experiences in general, are not superficial pangs, flashes, imagination, freaks, but solid, substantial, deep, inwrought into the frame and temper of their minds, and discovered to have respect to practice.

That they long after HOLINESS, and that all their experiences increase their longing.

Let 'em be inquired of concerning their disposition and willingness to bear the Cross, sell all for Christ, choosing their portion in heaven, &c. ...

Makes 'em long after perfect freedom from sin, and after those things wherein Holiness consists; and by fixed and strong resolutions, attended with fear and jealousy of their own hearts.

Whether, when they tell of their experiences, it is not with such an air that you as it were feel that they expect to be admired and applauded, and [whether they] won't be disappointed if they fail of discerning in you something of that nature; and shocked and displeased if they discover the contrary.

Enquire whether their joy be truly and properly joy in God and in Christ; joy in Divine Good; or whether it ben't wholly joy in themselves, joy in their own excellencies or privileges, in their experiences; what God has done for them, or what He has promised He will do for them; and whether they ben't affected with their own discoveries and affections.

— Jonathan Edwards
(1703–1758)

Rev. Alexander Grant, *Selections From the Unpublished Writings of Jonathan Edwards*, 1865. (Reprinted: Ugonier, MA: Soli Deo Publications, 1992)

The Voice of Elijah
P.O. Box 2257
Rockwall, TX 75087-2257
972-635-2021

Is It Time To Renew?

Check the mailing label below. If it says, "TIME TO RENEW," your subscription expires with this issue. Don't miss a single issue! Use the order form on the reverse of this page to renew your subscription now.

BULK RATE
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
MESQUITE, TX
PERMIT NO. 0038



Published Quarterly by
Voice of Elijah, Inc.

Ken Brooks, Executive Editor
Susan Clay, Managing Editor

Volume 6
Number 1
January 1995

All correspondence
should be addressed to:

Voice of Elijah, Inc.
P.O. Box 2257
Rockwall, TX 75087-2257

Subscription rates:
(1 year, U.S. Funds)

U.S. \$24.00
Canada \$30.00
Abroad \$50.00

Articles published by permission of
Larry D. Harper
(dba The Elijah Project).

Except when otherwise noted,
Scripture taken from the
New American Standard Bible,
© 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971,
1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1987, 1988.
The Lockman Foundation.
Used by permission.

Bolded Scripture reflects
the emphasis of the author.

Copyright © 1995, 2012, 2018
by Voice of Elijah, Inc.
voiceofelijah.org
facebook.com/voiceofelijahinc

A Note From the Editor

The start of a new year is, for many, the ideal time for new beginnings. So it is here at *The Voice of Elijah*®. The new format of the newsletter reflects a fundamental change in our organization. Over the last year we've changed our organizational structure in an effort to better define and focus on our primary goals and objectives. We've also changed our overall strategy and made much more progress toward using the contributions we receive to better serve those who want to know the Truth.

In keeping with our new strategy, this coming year promises still more change. Beginning with this issue, the newsletter will take on a completely different character. Our use of new page layout programs, the adoption of a new format and printing on different paper will hopefully make the newsletter easier to read, as well as more pleasing to the eye.

As part of another new beginning, I'm joining *The Voice of Elijah*® as the new Managing Editor, replacing Sara Brooks. She has served faithfully over the past four years since the first issue was published in October of 1990. I can only try to serve as competently from this day forward. Please feel free to write us with any comments and suggestions you may have regarding the newsletter. We always appreciate additional input.

Hopefully, 1995 will see the perfect-bound publication of *The Mystery of Scripture, Volume 1*. The publication of the final copy has had to take a back seat recently, but as God wills, time should be available this year to finish it up. Also, our video project has made definite progress, as we have added much-needed equipment and learned some of the tricks of the trade. A lot of research and "shopping around" has gone into each decision, and we believe we'll soon be able to produce quality videotapes to offer our readers.

A special "thank you" is in order for those of you who have supported this ministry over the years both financially and with your prayers, especially over the past year. We encourage any who may have considered becoming Monthly Contributors in the past to do so now. For a small monthly contribution, you will not only gain a wealth of information for eternity, you will also help us reach and teach those who need the food of *The Teaching*. I encourage you to give as it has been given to you. An Order Form is included in each issue for your convenience.

Grace and peace to you in Him,

Susan D. Clay

The Politics of Nicæa: Constantine and the Church

Satan has put some incredible twists on the Christian message over the past two thousand years, but none has been more fantastic than the plethora of absolute goofiness that has come out over the past century and a half. More than a few zealous airheads have attracted a sizeable following preaching Satan's lies, but none more so than the ultimate spin doctors who are now proffering the spiritually bankrupt notion that it doesn't matter *WHAT you believe*, it only matters *THAT you have* at some point in your life "professed Christ," or "accepted Jesus." (See "Satan's Fools Are Satan's Tools," *The Voice of Elijah*®, April 1994.)

At the peril of sounding downright heretical to some, let me ask a pointed question: Exactly *WHAT* must a person believe to be saved? Now I realize that question is today quickly becoming irrelevant as more and more "Christians" are content to identify the essentials of Christianity with such nebulous notions as a superficial expression of love and concern for others. That inanity may be the norm today, but just because the masses believe it doesn't *mean* it is true. First of all, it shifts the focus of Christianity from the objective realm of doctrinal beliefs into the subjective realm of personal feelings. That, in turn, leads to the inevitable conclusion that the Truth of Christianity is whatever a loving, caring individual chooses to believe it is.

Correct me if I've missed the point, but I do seem to recall my mother and father taught me the difference between the truth and a lie quite some time ago—nearly half a century ago as a matter of fact. While I may have been slow, I certainly wasn't stupid. I can readily attest to the fact that honesty is *ALWAYS* the best policy for a small boy who can't be sure how

much his parents know about his involvement in certain prohibited activities. I discovered early on that truth can sometimes provide an escape from punishment. A lie makes it unavoidable.

While we're on the subject of lies, let me state that those who practice a Christianity in which the primary doctrine is "turn to Jesus and feel good forever" don't know it, but they have bought into Satan's most enticing lie. (See "Questions & Answers" in this issue.) They have no idea that their goofiness has nothing in common with the historic Truth of Christianity. Nor do they realize their idiocy did not even exist in the Church much earlier than our own generation.

Bear with me while I tie down a few loose ends. Conservative Christians living just a century ago argued that *WHAT you believe* is extremely important. They said it is so important, in fact, that it will determine your eternal salvation. Nearly every Christian alive a mere two hundred years ago agreed with them. At the time of the Protestant Reformation five hundred years ago, every Christian—alive *and dead*—would have asserted that *WHAT you believe* determines where you will spend eternity.

As you can see, we "Christians" have come a long way down in an extremely short time. To be quite honest about it however, I know I'm preaching to the choir. Those who practice a "feel good" Christianity don't care whether their rendition of the Christian message has anything in common with any earlier version. They didn't become "Christians" because they were looking for Truth. They became "Christians" so they could feel good about themselves. Consequently, it doesn't matter to them *WHAT* they or any other "Christian" believes. It only matters

THAT everybody feels good about themselves and everybody else.

Given those circumstances, you can understand why the proponents of “feel-good Christianity” would rather that you not discuss the subject of *WHAT you believe* with them. Should you do so, most will view you as a rather boring nerd who wants to discuss a mundane topic at their lively party. Some will get downright indignant that you would dare bring up anything that might “produce division” in the Body of Jesus Christ.

The last-mentioned group of folks fail to understand WHY the Body of Jesus Christ is already divided into Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and countless Protestant sects and denominations, including something over half-a-hundred different Baptist denominations. They don’t know that sad situation came into being because until just recently, most Christians understood that *WHAT you believed* was important. Therefore, “Christians” in earlier generations who did not believe the same things divided along doctrinal lines.

Now that’s a novel concept, isn’t it? Who would have ever thought that Truth might be more important than a superficial unity based on a notion as phony as a nine dollar bill? Actually, I’m just being facetious. Folks who would settle for an artificial Christian unity rather than an accurate understanding of the Truth aren’t anything new. They have been around at least since the time of Constantine the Great.

Constantine and the Nicene Creed

You’ve heard about Constantine, haven’t you? (See “How the West Became ‘Christian’: Constantine and the Church,” *The Voice of Elijah*®, July 1994.) Now there was a man who valued Christian unity! He was also a man in a position to put wheels on it. Let me show you the doctrinal statement that the “unified” Church produced while Constantine reigned as Emperor over the Roman Empire:

We believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of all things, visible and invisible;

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten from the Father, only-begotten, that is, from the substance

of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father, through Whom all things came into being, things in heaven and things on earth, Who because of us men and because of our salvation came down and became incarnate, becoming man, suffered and rose again on the third day, ascended to the heavens, and will come to judge the living and the dead;

And in the Holy Spirit.

But as for those who say, There was when He was not, and, Before being born He was not, and that He came into existence out of nothing, or who assert that the Son of God is from a different hypostasis or substance, or is created, or is subject to alteration or change—these the Catholic Church anathematizes.

(J.N.D. Kelly, Early Christian Doctrines [San Francisco: Harper, 1978], p. 232)

That is the Nicene Creed. It was produced by the Council of Nicæa in A.D. 325 at the behest of Constantine the Great. Naïve “Christians” tend to look at the Creed as nothing more than a simple statement of orthodoxy. Why shouldn’t they? After all, Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant alike subscribe to the words of this Creed. That is because it makes no statements that contradict what we know about the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. However, most folks don’t know that the emperor of the Roman Empire, Constantine the Great, insisted that the muckety-mucks in the Christian Church sing and dance together to his tune in order to produce the Nicene Creed. Therefore, we can learn quite a lot about how Satan worked in the Early Church by investigating the circumstances surrounding this one creedal statement.

First of all, I should tell you that you are never going to gain an orthodox understanding of the nature of the Trinity by merely reading the statements of the Nicene Creed. (For a glimpse into the Apostolic understanding of the Trinity, see “Poetry Ain’t All Bad (Contrary to What I Thought Yesterday),” *The Voice of Elijah*® *Update*, February 1993.) Orthodox faith has to come from an orthodox content in the totality of *WHAT* one believes about God and His works in history. It does not stem from the mere recitation of an “orthodox” creed that one may or may not even understand.

[See “The Demons Also Believe (Poor Devils!)” and “Do You Believe the Gospel of Jesus Christ?” *The Voice of Elijah*®, October 1991.]

The form of the Nicene Creed is similar to that of the Apostles’ Creed, but a detailed comparison will show some interesting differences (see Table, page 4), especially in the description of the attributes of the Son. Notice the use of the terms “from the substance of the Father” and “of one substance with the Father.” In addition, the Nicene Creed concludes with anathemas. These differences were *meant* to combat a particular Christian heresy known as Arianism.

Arianism derives its name from the chief proponent of its teachings, a man named Arius. Although we can today easily recognize the basic tenets of Arianism as unorthodox, its adherents in the fourth century would have heartily disagreed. They believed Arianism was the logical result of a specific method of interpreting the Scriptures. You see, the Arians were able to draw their heretical conclusions about the nature of the Son and His relationship to the Father by following a literal method of biblical interpretation.

Fortunately for us, the “orthodox” majority of the Eastern Church followed the allegorical method of interpretation that Origen had introduced at the beginning of the previous century. (See “The Origen of Folly” and “Did You Mean That Literally?” *The Voice of Elijah*®, January 1993.) They were, therefore, able to stand against those who ignorantly argued that the Scriptures must always be interpreted literally.

To fully appreciate the creedal statement published by the Council of Nicæa, one needs at least a rudimentary understanding of how Satan played one school of “Christian” thought off against the other to achieve his own ends. So let’s look into the origins of these two methods of biblical interpretation.

Origen and Allegory

The older of the two methods of biblical interpretation originated in Alexandria, an Egyptian city located on the delta of the Nile River. Alexandria was founded by Alexander the Great in 331 B.C. and, by the time of Jesus Christ, had become widely recognized as a center of learning, strongly influenced by Greek culture and philosophy.

The Jewish philosopher Philo (ca. 30 B.C.–A.D. 40) lived comfortably in Alexandria at the time when Jesus

Christ walked the dusty trails of Palestine, teaching the Hebrew idioms and *parabolic imagery* of “The Way” of God to all who had an ear to hear. Philo didn’t know anything at all about the parables of Scripture, but he did know a bit about the parable’s first cousin, allegory. That’s why he holds the dubious distinction of being the first to advocate using an allegorical method of interpretation as a means of understanding the Old Testament.

Philo believed that many of the Old Testament accounts were too fantastic to be literally true. However, he also believed the Old Testament was inspired by God. Therefore, he felt compelled to explain the purpose of these “fantastic” stories. He contended that the Greek allegorical method, as it was used by Stoic philosophers to glean spiritual and moral truths from Homeric poetry, accomplished this objective exceedingly well.

Philo’s appropriation of the allegorical methodology of the Stoic philosophers provided the Jewish religion a measure of credibility in the cosmopolitan culture of the Greek world. Consequently, it is only logical that his writings would eventually exert an influence on Christian Teachers who came along after the leaders of the Early Church began to dabble in Greek philosophy.

Keep in mind the fact that, after the establishment of the Church by the Apostles, the first few generations of Church leaders were concerned solely with the transmission of *The Apostolic Teaching* to the following generation. (See “Did You Mean That Literally?” January 1993 and “Some People Will Make Light of Anything,” *The Voice of Elijah*®, April 1994.) These men forthrightly tell us they wanted nothing more than to *hand down* the Truth they had *received* just as it had been *handed down* to them from Jesus Christ through the Apostles.

For those interested in learning more about this, I have discussed these technical terms and related details in various articles in *The Voice of Elijah*® *Update* that comment on the Apostolic literature of the Early Church. (See especially “Consider the Source,” February 1994; “Legitimate Authority Means Nothing to a Rebel,” May 1994; “Who’s Watchin’ da Bishop?” June 1994; “Weeds, Seeds, and Weed Seeds!” August 1994; and “Do You Have Ears to Hear?” *The Voice of Elijah*®, September 1994.)

The Nicene Creed

A.D. 325

We believe

1. in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of all things, visible and invisible;
2. and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten from the Father, only-begotten, that is, from the substance of the Father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father, through Whom all things came into being, things in Heaven and things on Earth,
3. Who because of us men and because of our salvation came down and became incarnate, becoming man,
4. suffered and
5. rose again on the third day,
6. ascended to the heavens,
7. and will come to judge the living and the dead;
8. and in the Holy Spirit.

9. But as for those who say there was when He was not, and before being born He was not, and that He came into existence out of nothing, or who assert that the Son of God is from a different hypostasis or substance, or is created, or is subject to alteration or change—these the Catholic Church anathematizes.

The Apostles' Creed

(Rome) ca. A.D. 340

I believe

1. In God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth;
2. and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord;

3. Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary;
4. suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried;
5. He descended into Hades; the third day He rose from the dead;
6. He ascended into Heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty;
7. from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead.
8. And I believe in the Holy Ghost;

9. the holy Catholic Church; the communion of the saints;
10. the forgiveness of sins;
11. the resurrection of the body;
12. and the life everlasting.

The Constantinopolitan Creed

A.D. 381

We believe

1. in one God, the Father, Almighty, maker of Heaven and Earth, of all things visible and invisible;
2. and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten from the Father before all ages, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, of one substance with the Father, through Whom all things came into existence,
3. Who because of us men and because of our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became man,
4. and was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered and was buried,
5. and rose again on the third day according to the Scriptures,
6. and ascended to Heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father,
7. and will come again with glory to judge the living and dead, of Whose kingdom there will be no end;
8. and in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and life-giver, Who proceeds from the Father, Who with the Father and the Son is together worshipped and together glorified, Who spoke through the prophets;
9. in one holy Catholic and apostolic Church.
10. We confess one baptism, to the remission of sins;
11. we look forward to the resurrection of the dead
12. and the life of the world to come. Amen.

We have already seen that by the end of the second century A.D., much of *The Apostolic Teaching* had been lost. That loss occurred gradually, as crucial details were forgotten or inaccurately understood by slothful students of the Word. The Church eventually lost even the fundamental understanding that Jesus Christ had revealed an *oral tradition* to His disciples and commanded them to *hand down* that *oral tradition* to subsequent generations just as they had *received* it.

Having given up the notion that the Church's mission was to preserve and protect a divinely-revealed *oral tradition*, Christian Teachers gradually began to realize they could no longer clearly explain the relationship between the Old Testament and the New. They also found it increasingly difficult to defend the Apostolic contention that the Old Testament spoke explicitly concerning Jesus Christ. That's when Christian leaders began to look for ways to explain how the remnants of *The Apostolic Teaching* they still had in their possession could be obtained by someone interpreting the Hebrew Scriptures for themselves.

One of these Christian Teachers was a Stoic philosopher named Pantænus (A.D. 130?–200?) who converted to Christianity and became the director of the catechetical school of the Alexandrian church about A.D. 185. Having converted from Stoic philosophy, it was only natural that he would have a natural affinity for the tenets of that school of thought, including the allegorical method of interpretation. He evidently passed that along to his students.

One of Pantænus' students was the Early Church Father known as Clement of Alexandria (ca. A.D. 150–215). Clement succeeded Pantænus as director of the catechetical school in Alexandria around A.D. 200. He vigorously argued that the allegorical method of interpreting the Scriptures as he saw it used in the writings of the Jewish philosopher Philo adequately explained how the remnants of *The Apostolic Teaching* that the Church still understood at that time could have been derived from the Old Testament. To support his view, Clement quoted Philo extensively in his writings, particularly in his *Stromateis*.

Clement was followed as director of the theological school at Alexandria by his star pupil, Origen (A.D. 185–253). Although Clement had appealed to the allegorical method of interpreting the Scriptures

to explain how the Apostles could have acquired *The Apostolic Teaching* by reading the Hebrew Scriptures, the evidence indicates he did not attempt to alter the traditional *Teaching* he had *received*. By contrast, his student Origen not only used the allegorical method to interpret the Scriptures for himself, he also openly advocated that others do likewise. (See "The Origen of Folly," *The Voice of Elijah*®, January 1993; and the audiotape series *The Way, The Truth, The Life*.)

Origen taught that just as Man was composed of "body," "soul," and "spirit," the Scriptures must likewise be understood in the same three senses: the "bodily," or literal sense; the "soul," or moral sense; and the "spiritual," or allegorical/mystical sense. However Origen, just like Philo before him, did not believe all of the Scriptures depicted literal historical events. He states that plainly:

The exact reader will hesitate in regard to some passages, finding himself unable to decide without considerable investigation whether a particular incident, believed to be history, actually happened or not. Accordingly he who reads in an exact manner must, in obedience to the Savior's precept which says, "Search the scriptures" [John 5:39], carefully investigate how far the literal meaning is true and how far it is impossible, and to the utmost of his power must trace out from the use of similar expressions the meaning scattered everywhere throughout the scriptures of that which when taken literally is impossible.

(Origen, "De Principiis," 4.3.5.; R.M. Grant and D. Tracy, A Short History of the Interpretation of The Bible [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984], p. 58)

Since Origen believed *The Apostolic Teaching* was very clear on certain points, he did not advocate altering these things during his transmission of them to others. However, he did not believe other things in the Scriptures were so clearly explained by *The Apostolic Teaching*. Therefore, he argued they were open to personal interpretation.

Like the vile little agent of Satan that he was, Origen freely applied his allegorical method of interpretation to those parts of the Scriptures he considered "impossible" to be taken literally. He argued that passages like the Creation Account of Genesis 1 and 2 and the Fall of Man in Genesis 3 were not historical, but rather purely allegorical:

Now it ought to be known that the holy apostles, in preaching the faith of Christ, delivered themselves with the utmost clearness on certain points which they believed to be necessary to every one, even to those who seemed somewhat dull in the investigation of divine knowledge; leaving, however, the grounds of their statements to be examined into by those who should deserve the excellent gifts of the Spirit, and who, especially by means of the Holy Spirit Himself, should obtain the gift of language, of wisdom, and of knowledge: while on other subjects they merely stated the fact that things were so, keeping silence as to the manner or origin of their existence; clearly in order that the more zealous of their successors, who should be lovers of wisdom, might have a subject of exercise on which to display the fruit of their talents, —those persons, I mean, who should prepare themselves to be fit and worthy receivers of wisdom.

(Origen, "De Principiis," Preface, 3, in Roberts and Donaldson (Eds.), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (1885), Vol. 4, p. 239)

Did you catch what the numskull said about the Apostles leaving "lovers of wisdom" an opportunity to "display the fruit of their talents" by interpreting the Scriptures for themselves? What a crock of nonsense that is! Pay attention, True Believers! You have just read a rich bit of tripe written by a fellow who was undoubtedly one of Satan's all-time most piously imperious fools. If the Apostles did not provide in *The Apostolic Teaching* an understanding of the Truth sufficient to satisfy the hungry soul, then I'm certain Origen will rest forever in the bosom of Abraham. Trust me when I tell you his soul will roast in Hell forever because of the part he played in the loss of *The Apostolic Teaching*.

Operating within the constraints of little more than his own self-imposed mandate to "display the fruit of his talent" to others, Origen feverishly formulated his own doctrines for the instruction of the Church. For example, rather than adhering to the *parabolic* explanation of the Trinity that was a part of *The Apostolic Teaching*, Origen instead used Greek philosophical terminology to describe the differences between the Persons of the Godhead. He saw the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as each having their Own distinct *hypostasis*, or essence, but still having a unity of substance, or *ousia*. He described the function of

the Son as that of *mediator* between the Father and His creation, thus putting Jesus Christ in a subordinate relationship to the Father. In his own words:

God the Father is omnipotent, because He has power over all things, i.e., over heaven and earth, sun, moon, and stars, and all things in them. And He exercises His power over them by means of His Word, because at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, both of things in heaven, and things on earth, and things under the earth. And if every knee is bent to Jesus, then, without doubt, it is Jesus to whom all things are subject, and He it is who exercises power over all things, and through whom all things are subject to the Father ...

(Origen, "De Principiis," 1.2.10; Roberts, p. 250)

If you read that passage carefully, you probably noticed that Origen still gave vague credence to the *parabolic* remnants of *The Apostolic Teaching* according to which Jesus Christ was the Word of God, i.e., He was the spoken "Name" of God. That is because, to be most effective as Satan's agent, Origen could not blatantly contradict the basic Truth of Apostolic Christianity. Therefore, he upheld the divinity of the Son by stating that His generation by the Father was eternal, thus making Him co-eternal with the Father:

But it is monstrous and unlawful to compare God the Father, in the generation of His only-begotten Son, and in the substance of the same, to any man or other living thing engaged in such an act; ... so that a human mind should be able to apprehend how the unbegotten God is made the Father of the only-begotten Son. Because His generation is as eternal and everlasting as the brilliancy which is produced from the sun.

(Origen, "De Principiis," 1.2.4.; Roberts, p. 247)

Under Origen's direction (A.D. 203–231), the theological school at Alexandria gradually gained influence in the Eastern Church. In A.D. 232 Origen moved to Cæsarea in Palestine and opened another school, patterned after the one in Alexandria. This greatly extended the sphere of his influence. By the end of the third century, Origen's allegorical method of interpretation and much of his doctrine, including his doctrine of the Trinity, was recognized as orthodox by most in the Eastern Church.

Lucian, Arius, and Literalism

Christian scholars continue to ignorantly praise Clement of Alexandria and his pupil Origen for combining Christian teaching with secular philosophy. Little do they know these two mumbling mutes opened Pandora's box with their idiotic suggestion that the allegorical methodology of Philo adequately explained how the doctrines of Christianity derive from the Hebrew Scriptures. It is only logical that other misguided souls would eventually get around to suggesting a different method of interpretation. Satan knew that when they did, *The Apostolic Teaching* would become just one "interpretation" among many. Therefore, he ensured Origen's methodology had more than a few obvious flaws.

Church leaders were not long in striking Satan's bait. By the early fourth century, advocates of another school of scriptural interpretation had begun to strongly oppose Origen's allegorical method. One of these, Lucian of Samosata, became bishop of Antioch in A.D. 312 and founded a school there where he taught a literal method of interpreting the Scriptures.

The literalists of the Antiochene School accurately alleged that the allegorical school had denied the truth of the historical events in the Scriptures, thus reducing them to myth. They, therefore, contended that the allegorical method of interpreting the Scriptures destroyed the power of the Gospel:

But if their assertion is true, if the biblical writings do not preserve the narrative of actual events but point to something else, something profound which requires special understanding—something "spiritual" as they would like to say, which they have discovered because they are so spiritual themselves, then what is the source of their knowledge? Whatever name they may give to their interpretation, have they been taught by divine Scripture in their speaking? Also, I shall not even mention that, if they are correct, not even the reason for the events surrounding Christ's coming will be clear. The apostle says that Christ canceled Adam's disobedience and annulled the death sentence. What were those events in the distant past to which he refers, and where did they take place, if the historical account relating them does not signify real events but something else, as those people maintain? What room is left for the apostle's words, "but I fear lest, as the serpent seduced Eve"

[2 Cor. 11:3], if there was no serpent, no Eve, nor any seduction elsewhere involving Adam?

(Theodore of Mopsuestia, "Commentary on Galatians 4:22–31"; K. Froehlich, Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984], p. 97)

In referring to "their interpretation," this author has readily admitted that the Church had already given up its mission of *handing down* *The Apostolic Teaching*. His objection is not that the allegorists were interpreting Scripture for themselves, but that they were interpreting Scripture incorrectly. Therefore, interpreting Scripture for oneself must have already become a common practice in the Church by this time. Under those circumstances it is not surprising that one of the more obvious flaws in Origen's theology—the extreme position he had taken by refusing to accept the historicity of the biblical account—came under attack.

The literalists in the Antiochene school believed the historical events recounted in Scripture were to be understood as literally true. However, they also believed the biblical text contained a deeper *meaning*, or *theoria*, which could be derived from the historical events related in Scripture:

In any approach to holy Scripture, the literal reading of the text reveals some truths while the discovery of other truths requires the application of theoria. Now, given the vast difference between historia and theoria, allegory and figuration (tropologia) or parable (parabole), the interpreter must classify and determine each figurative expression with care and precision so that the reader can see what is history and what is theoria, and draw his conclusions accordingly.

(Diodore of Tarsus, "Preface to the Commentary on Psalm 118"; K. Froehlich, p. 87)

The advocates of the literal method of biblical interpretation provided a much needed counterbalance to the extreme positions taken by some in the allegorical school. But all was not well with their speculation either. The literal methodology led to the formulation of some equally absurd doctrines. As I stated above, the heretical conclusions drawn by Arius of Libya, a student of Lucian, regarding the nature of the Trinity initiated the Arian controversy. That controversy ultimately resulted in the Council of Nicæa.

Before Arius began voicing his view of the Trinity, the majority in the Eastern Church subscribed to the doctrine proposed by Origen. However, Arius argued that the supremacy of the Father was not adequately upheld in Origen's theology. He believed the Father was the One Supreme God Who could not share his substance, or *ousia*, with another. Therefore, he taught that the Son was with God before the creation of the world, but that there was a time when He was not. Then God the Father created the Son out of nothing; and the Son, in turn, created the world. This made Jesus Christ a created being, superior to the rest of creation, but created nonetheless:

*God then himself is in essence ineffable to all:
He alone has neither equal nor like, none comparable in
glory;
We call him Unbegotten because of the one in nature
begotten;
We raise hymns to him as Unbegun because of him who
has beginning.
We adore him as eternal because of the one born in time.
The Unbegun appointed the Son to be Beginning of
things begotten, and bore him as his own Son, in this
case giving birth.
He has nothing proper to God in his essential property,
for neither is he equal nor yet consubstantial with him.
(Arius, "Thalia"; Athanasius, "On the Synods of
Ariminum and Seleucia," 15; Stevenson [New York:
MacMillan], pp. 350–351)*

This understanding of the nature of the God of Israel came from a literal interpretation of passages like Acts 2:36, "God has made Him both Lord and Christ" and Colossians 1:15, "He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation." Another passage from which Arius could have easily derived the phrase "The Unbegun appointed the Son to be Beginning of things begotten" is in Proverbs:

*"The LORD possessed me at the beginning of His way,
Before His works of old.
From everlasting I was established,
From the beginning, from the earliest times of the earth."
(Proverbs 8:22–23)*

The literalists accurately understood that this and other Old Testament passages speak concerning

Jesus Christ. However, that is apparently all they understood concerning the Hebrew idioms and *parabolic imagery* that lies behind such passages. Consequently, their literal interpretation of this and other *parabolic statements* they found in the Scriptures led them to the "logical" conclusion that Jesus Christ must be viewed as a created being.

Those who firmly embraced Origen's doctrine of the Trinity emphatically rejected the literal point of view on the grounds that it denied the eternal existence of the Son, and therefore, His divinity. They argued that if the Son was not divine, His death and Resurrection could not effect the redemption of mankind.

When Alexander, the Bishop of Alexandria from A.D. 312–A.D. 328, heard what Arius was teaching, he admonished him for his error and encouraged him to return to the "correct" teaching. When Arius refused, Alexander pronounced his teaching heresy and informed him he was in danger of excommunication. Arius responded by accusing Alexander of the heresy of Sabellianism for not seeing the truth of what he was teaching.

To understand Arius' charge, one needs to know that Sabellius gained notoriety in the early part of the third century by teaching a heresy known as Modalistic Monarchianism. You may recall that his run-in with Hippolytus resulted in the first "Protestant" call for Church reformation. [See "Poetry Ain't All Bad (Contrary to What I Thought Yesterday)," *The Voice of Elijah® Update*, February 1993.] Sabellius believed the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were merely different faces, "names," or modes, of the One God. Therefore, he taught that, after the One God created the world, He then presented Himself as the Father when He gave the Old Testament Law at Mt. Sinai. He then came as the Son to initiate the New Covenant. And finally, He showed Himself as the Holy Spirit to bring about regeneration and sanctification. When the work of redemption is complete, He will return to His state as the One God.

Arius' accusation of Sabellianism did nothing to deter Alexander. In A.D. 318, he convened a synod of nearly one hundred presbyters in Alexandria. The synod denounced Arius' teaching and formally excommunicated him and his followers. Alexander then circulated a letter, signed by himself, thirty-six priests and forty-four deacons, to the leaders of the

Eastern churches. In it he denounced Arianism as heresy and warned the other churches not to fellowship with any of the Arians. His letter clearly summarizes Arius' beliefs:

"Know therefore that there have recently arisen in our diocese lawless and anti-christian men, teaching apostasy such as one may justly consider and denominate the forerunner of Antichrist. I wished indeed to consign this disorder to silence, that if possible the evil might be confined to the apostates alone; and lest going forth into other districts, it should contaminate the ears of some of the simple. ... The dogmas they assert in utter contrariety to the Scriptures, and wholly of their own devising, are these:—that God was not always a father, but that there was a period when he was not a father; that the Word of God was not from eternity, but was made out of nothing; for that the ever-existing God (the I AM—the eternal One) made him, who did not previously exist, out of nothing. Thus they conclude there was a time when he did not exist, inasmuch as, according to their philosophy, the Son is a creature and a work; that he is neither like the Father as it regards his essence, nor is by nature either the Father's true Word, or true Wisdom, but indeed one of his works and creatures, being erroneously called Word and Wisdom, since his was himself made by God's own Word and the Wisdom which is in God, whereby God both made all things and him also. 'Wherefore,' say they, 'he is as to his nature mutable and susceptible of change, as all other rational creatures are: hence the Word is alien to and other than the essence of God; and the Father is inexplicable by the Son, and invisible to him, for neither does the Son perfectly and accurately know the Father, neither can he distinctly see him. The Son knows not the nature of his own essence: for he was made on our account, in order that God might create us by him, as by an instrument; nor would he ever have existed, unless God had wished to create us.' Some one accordingly asked them whether the Word of God could be changed, as the devil has been? and they feared not to say, 'Yes, he could; for being begotten and created, he is susceptible of change.' We then, with the bishops of Egypt and Libya, being assembled together to the number of nearly a hundred, have anathematized Arius for his shameless avowal of these heresies, together with all such as have countenanced them."

(Socrates, *The Ecclesiastical History of Socrates* [London: George Bell & Sons, 1892], pp. 7–8)

Alexander was not the only one publicizing the controversy. Arius also sent letters to others, seeking allies. In one such letter Arius presented his case to Eusebius, Bishop of Nicomedia, and recited Alexander's position. From it we can see how closely Alexander's beliefs adhere to Origen's doctrine of the Trinity:

To his very dear lord, the faithful man of God, orthodox Eusebius, Arius, unjustly persecuted by Pope Alexander on account of that all-conquering truth which you also defend as with a shield, sends greeting in the Lord. ... we do not concur in what he publicly preaches, namely, that "God has always been, and the Son has always been: Father and Son exist together: the Son has His existence unbegotten along with God ever being begotten, without having been begotten: God does not precede the Son by thought or by any interval however small: God has always been, the Son has always been; the Son is from God himself". ... We are persecuted because we say, "the Son had a beginning, but God is without beginning." This is really the cause of our persecution; and, likewise, because we say that He is from nothing. And this we say, because he is neither part of God, nor of any lower essence. For this are we persecuted; the rest you know. Farewell in the Lord. As a fellow-disciple of Lucian, and as a truly pious man, as your name implies, remember our afflictions.

(*Letter of Arius to Eusebius Bishop of Nicomedia, c. 320*, J. Stevenson, *A New Eusebius* [London: SPCK, 1957], pp. 344–345)

Notice that Arius called Eusebius of Nicomedia a "fellow-disciple of Lucian" and appealed to "the all-conquering truth which you [Eusebius] also defend." The "truth" he had in mind has to be what the two of them had learned in Lucian's school in Antioch. It is apparent from this letter that Arius was only teaching his Alexandrian followers what he and Eusebius had been taught at the school in Antioch. Therefore, it is no surprise that Arius found an ally in Eusebius of Nicomedia.

When Eusebius received Arius' letter, he convened a council in Bithynia to reverse the decision of the synod of Alexandria. The council restored Arius to the fellowship of the Church, and declared his teaching orthodox. A letter was sent to Alexander exhorting him to do the same. Alexander refused. Instead, he

circulated another letter, signed by almost two hundred church leaders, denouncing Arius in even stronger language and warning against his heresy.

Alexander's second letter moved Eusebius of Cæsarea to take action. Unlike Eusebius of Nicomedia, Eusebius of Cæsarea was not entirely pro-Arian. He had been educated in Origen's catechetical school in Cæsarea, and therefore, followed the allegorical method of interpretation. Although he did not fully endorse Arius' teaching, he did not think it particularly harmful either.

Like Arius, Eusebius of Cæsarea strongly subordinated the Son to the Father, believing that the Father was completely removed from His creation and the Son was a *mediator*. Also like Arius, he was not willing to admit the Son was of the same substance as the Father, which he felt was dangerously close to Sabellianism. But, unlike Arius, he did not go so far as to say that He was created, or that there was a time when He was not.

When Eusebius of Cæsarea read Alexander's letter condemning Arius, he convened a council in Palestine in support of Arius and called for reconciliation between the factions. By this time the controversy had spread throughout the Eastern Church.

Somewhere around this time (A.D. 320–321), Licinius, the emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire, initiated his persecution of Christians. (See "How the West Became 'Christian': Constantine and the Church," *The Voice of Elijah*®, July 1994.) One of his edicts forbade the assembly of Church councils or the movement of bishops beyond the boundaries of their sees. This forced the Arian controversy to lie dormant a few years. However, when Constantine defeated Licinius in September of A.D. 324 and restored religious freedoms, the controversy erupted anew.

Constantine Intervenes

After defeating Licinius, Constantine set about converting the newly-united Roman Empire to the worship of the One True God. To his way of thinking, this required a unified Church under his direct oversight. If Christian unity was threatened, Constantine was prepared to intervene to the extent necessary to restore unity. This tendency is aptly illustrated by his handling of the Donatist schism in the North African Church. (See "How the West Became 'Christian':

Constantine and the Church," *The Voice of Elijah*®, July 1994.)

By the time Constantine had consolidated his control of the empire and turned his attention to Church affairs, the Arian controversy had already attracted the notice and ridicule of the pagan world. To Constantine, that situation was intolerable. He considered it his moral obligation to bring the controversy to an end. Toward that end, he wrote a letter to both Alexander and Arius in the spring of A.D. 324, rebuking them for letting their dispute reach such proportions. He encouraged them to put aside their theological differences and be reconciled in the interest of Christian unity. You can see from the following that he had no honest interest in the Truth embodied in either position:

"Permit me further to remind you of your duty by an example of an inferior kind. You are well aware that even the philosophers themselves, while all confederated under one sect, yet often disagree with each other on some parts of their theories: but although they may differ in their views on the very highest branches of science, yet in order to maintain the unity of their body, they still agree to coalesce. Now if this is done amongst them, how much more equitable will it be for you, who have been constituted ministers of the Most High God, to become unanimous with one another in the same religious profession."
(Socrates, p. 14)

Constantine sent this letter to Alexandria by the hand of Ossius, Bishop of Cordova, who had been in Constantine's entourage since before his "conversion" in A.D. 312. While in Alexandria, Ossius attended a synod which deferred final settlement of the controversy until a council could be held in Ancyra later that year.

On his way back to Constantine, Ossius stopped in Antioch and attended yet another Church council where the primary order of business was to replace the Bishop of Antioch, who had died in December of A.D. 324. However, this council also addressed the Arian problem, pronouncing Arius' teaching heretical and defining what they believed to be orthodox belief. All but three of the bishops attending endorsed the decision of the council. Eusebius of Cæsarea and two other dissenters were conditionally excommunicated.

Final determination of their situation was also deferred to the great council in Ancyra, at which time they were to be permitted to present evidence of their orthodoxy.

Leaving Antioch, Ossius finally returned to Constantine, without achieving an end to the controversy. Having been unsuccessful through the efforts of Ossius, Constantine stepped up the level of intervention. He decided the great council, originally slated to convene in Ancyra, would, instead, be held in Nicæa. Constantine wrote the following to announce his decision:

That there is nothing more honourable in my sight than the fear of God, is, I believe, manifest to every man. Now because it was agreed formerly that the Synod of Bishops should meet at Ancyra of Galatia, it hath seemed to us on many accounts that it would be well for a Synod to assemble at Nicæa, a city of Bithynia, both because the Bishops from Italy and the rest of the countries of Europe are coming, and because of the excellent temperature of the air, and in order that I may be present as a spectator and participator in those things which will be done. Wherefore I signify to you, my beloved brethren, that all of you promptly assemble at the said city, that is at Nicæa. Let every one of you therefore, regarding that which is best, as I before said, be diligent, without delay in anything, speedily to come, that he may be in his own person present as a spectator of those things which will be done by the same.

God keep you my beloved brethren.

*("Constantine Summons the Council of Nicæa,"
J. Stevenson, p. 358)*

Dead set on achieving Christian unity throughout the Church, Constantine elevated the council to universal status by inviting bishops from the Western churches as well. As he had done with the Council of Arles in A.D. 314, he provided for the transportation and lodging of all attendees.

The Council of Nicæa

In late May or early June of A.D. 325, the council convened in Constantine's palace at Nicæa. Tradition tells us 318 church leaders from throughout the Eastern and Western provinces of the Roman Empire attended. Ossius of Cordova presided with Constantine himself

in attendance. In his opening address to the council, Constantine made his expectations plain to all. The Early Church historian, Socrates, recorded the following:

When a silence suitable to the occasion had been observed, the emperor from his seat began to address them, entreating each to lay aside all private pique, and exhorting them to unanimity and concord. For several of them had brought accusations against one another, and many had even presented petitions to the emperor the day before. But he directing their attention to the matter before them, and on account of which they were assembled, ordered these petitions to be burnt; merely observing that Christ enjoins him who is anxious to obtain forgiveness, to forgive his brother. When therefore he had strongly insisted on the maintenance of harmony and peace, he then sanctioned their purpose of more closely investigating the questions at issue.

(Socrates, p. 19)

For Constantine, no theological issue was important enough to allow dissension in the Church. His burning of the petitions the attendees presented him made that abundantly clear. "Unanimity and concord" were all that mattered. As one modern historian describes his beliefs:

Constantine believed that all people should be Christian, but that Christians might legitimately hold divergent opinions on theological questions and that sensible Christians could disagree about doctrine in a spirit of brotherly love.

(T. Barnes, Constantine and Eusebius [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981], p. 213)

That sounds like the stance taken by a lot of Church leaders today, doesn't it? Then, as now, the more magnanimous favored unity at all costs, no matter whether the Truth was compromised in the process.

Going into the council, Constantine had already made up his mind. Although his letter of summons stated he intended to be merely a "spectator and participator," the evidence suggests otherwise. He *meant* to coerce and manipulate. The first order of business was the examination of Eusebius of Cæsarea, who was permitted to submit proof of his orthodoxy in an

effort to overturn his excommunication by the Council of Antioch. He recited the Creed of the church at Cæsarea, which he claimed to have recited at his own baptism:

*We believe in one God,
the Father Almighty,
maker of all things, visible and invisible,
and in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the Word [Logos] of God,
God from God,
light from light,
life from life,
the only-begotten Son,
first-born of all creatures,
begotten of the Father before all ages,
by whom also all things were made;
who for our salvation was made flesh and dwelt among
men,
and who suffered and
rose again on the third day,
and ascended to the Father
and shall come again in glory
to judge the living and the dead.
We believe also in one Holy Spirit.
(D. Christie-Murray, A History of Heresy [Oxford:
Oxford University Press, 1976], pp. 47–48)*

Eusebius then proceeded to defend himself:

*"In the presence of God Almighty, and of our Lord Jesus Christ, we testify, that thus we have believed and thought from our heart and soul, since we were capable of forming a judgment on the matter, and have possessed a right estimate of ourselves; and that we now think and speak what is perfectly in accordance with the truth. We are moreover prepared to prove to you by undeniable evidences, and to convince you that in time past we have thus believed, and so preached."
(Socrates, p. 23)*

Constantine personally pronounced Eusebius' Creed orthodox, with only the stipulation that Eusebius be willing to add the term *homoousios*, "of the same substance," to his description of the relationship of the Son to the Father. He then encouraged the council to work from such beliefs to formulate a universal creed that would be endorsed by all.

"Of the Same Substance"

Scholars debate who instigated Constantine's use of the term *homoousios* at the Council of Nicæa. Some believe he came up with it on his own. Others argue Alexander of Alexandria and Ossius decided before the council actually met that he should use it. Either way, it is evident Constantine used his endorsement of the term *homoousios* to circumvent debate and thereby achieve his desired result—"Christian" unity.

The Greek term *homoousios* is a compound word formed by the words *homo*, "same," and *ousia*, "substance." As used in Greek philosophy, *ousia* had variant meanings such as "being," "essence," or "reality." Therefore, the meaning of *homoousios* was somewhat ambiguous, depending on individual interpretation. However, Constantine's use of the term was not without precedent in Christian theology. Origen had also used it to describe the relationship between Father and Son as being of the same essence. Although he subordinated the Son to the Father, he demonstrated their unity by his use of this one term.

The issue was somewhat complicated however, by the fact that in the A.D. 260s a Sabellian faction in the Libyan church had also used the term. In their case, *homoousios* was meant to describe the identity of the Son with the Father. This was precisely the sense of the term to which the Arians objected. They saw the term as materialistic, and they believed it was impossible for God to divide His substance.

The Sabellian sense of the term also bothered Eusebius of Cæsarea, who proposed that *homoiousios*, "of like substance," be substituted for *homoousios* as a compromise. This term was even more ambiguous and could be easily accepted (and divergently interpreted) by members of either camp. That is perhaps why Alexander's assistant, Athanasius, strongly objected to the use of this term and persuaded the assembly to use the term *homoousios* instead.

The majority would have preferred to use terminology from Scripture. It was unprecedented to use Greek philosophical language in a document intended to present orthodox teaching. But because the Arians were adept at using the literal interpretation of Scripture to substantiate their own views, *homoousios* seemed to be the only adequate term that could be used to refute their heresy.

The Eastern Roman Empire of the Fourth Century A.D.



Finally, after much contemplation regarding the possible meanings of the term *homoousios*, and with additional coaxing from Constantine, Eusebius of Cæsarea agreed the creed was orthodox. He justified his reversal in a letter to his church at Cæsarea:

"When these articles of faith were proposed, they were received without opposition: nay, our most pious emperor himself was the first to admit that they were perfectly orthodox, and that he precisely concurred in the sentiments contained in them; exhorting all present to give them their assent, and subscribe to these very articles, thus agreeing in an unanimous profession of them. It was suggested however that the word ὁμοούσιος (consubstantial) should be introduced, an expression which the emperor himself explained, as not indicating corporeal affection or

properties; and consequently that the Son did not subsist from the Father either by division or abscission: for, said he, a nature which is immaterial and incorporeal cannot possibly be subject to any corporeal affections; hence our apprehension of such things can only be expressed in divine and mysterious terms. Such was the philosophical view of the subject taken by our most wise and pious sovereign; ..."

(Socrates, pp. 23–24)

It seems incredible that Eusebius of Cæsarea would be so willing to change that for which he had previously suffered excommunication, until one considers he was present at the council to regain his position among the "orthodox." It makes sense that he would have been willing to make concessions. But,

along with “from the substance of the Father,” other statements in the Creed were obviously intended to refute the Arian heresy, i.e., “only-begotten,” “true God from true God.” How did all present find it possible to agree? One author presents the following explanation:

“‘Only-begotten’ for the orthodox meant ‘begotten in a way different from men who can become sons of God by receiving ‘the spirit of adoption’; for the Arian it meant ‘the only one directly created.’ ‘Of the substance of the Father’ and ‘true God from true God,’ though going far towards pinning the heterodox to orthodoxy, could be interpreted as ‘made of the substance and into true God by God’. ‘Came down’ and ‘ascended into the heavens’ implied to the orthodox that Christ was neither different from nor subordinate to God; and ‘was made man’ suggested that Jesus was true man as well as true God; but the Arians could cheerfully accept the three phrases and interpret them to fit their views.”
(Christie-Murray, p. 48)

Given Constantine’s political genius, it is reasonable to assume he took full advantage of the fact that Eusebius of Cæsarea came to the council seeking to restore his reputation as a teacher of orthodoxy. His pronouncement that Eusebius’ theology was orthodox and his introduction of the ambiguously interpreted *homoousios* made it difficult for any but the most staunchly Arian to refuse to endorse the Creed. If Constantine could down-play the use of the already ambiguously interpreted term *homoousios* to bring Eusebius to agreement, that was good enough for him. The scholar J.N.D. Kelly accurately describes Constantine’s motivation:

For Constantine himself the theological issue was not the primary one: he was interested in re-establishing unity in the Church, and somehow or other he had persuaded himself, or been persuaded, that this formula [homoousios] was likely to promote it. He was less concerned about the interpretation people put upon it than about getting them to append their signatures to it.
(J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, Third Edition [New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1972], pp. 253–254)

Ultimately, Emperor Constantine got what he wanted. All but three attendees signed the Creed. Arius and two Libyan bishops who had sided with him from the beginning dissented. They were immediately excommunicated from the Church and exiled. Two other bishops, Eusebius of Nicomedia and Theognis of Nicæa, agreed with the Creed, but not the anathemas. They were not immediately excommunicated. Instead they were permitted time to reconsider. The remaining members of this first ecumenical council, comprised of leaders from both the Eastern and Western churches of the Roman Empire, provided what Constantine considered to be essential. He could show to the pagan world a unified Christian Church as the One True religion under which the Roman Empire would prosper.

The decisions of the council were circulated by letter among all the churches:

“To the holy, by the grace of God, and great Church of the Alexandrians, and to our beloved brethren throughout Egypt, Libya, and Pentapolis, the bishops assembled at Nice, constituting the great and holy synod, send greeting in the Lord.

Since, by the grace of God, a great and holy synod has been convened at Nice, our most pious sovereign Constantine having summoned us out of various cities and provinces for that purpose, it appeared to us indispensably necessary that a letter should be written to you on the part of the sacred synod; in order that ye may know what subjects were brought under consideration, what rigidly investigated, and also what was eventually determined on and decreed.”
(Socrates, p. 26)

In addition, Constantine himself circulated letters in which he made it clear he expected universal allegiance to the Creed and the decisions of the Ecumenical Council:

“Constantine Augustus, to the Catholic Church of the Alexandrians. Beloved brethren, we send you greeting! We have received from Divine Providence the inestimable blessing of being relieved from all error, and united in the acknowledgement of one and the same faith. The devil will no longer have any power against us, since all that which he had malignantly devised for our destruction has been entirely overthrown. The

splendour of truth has dissipated at the command of God those dissensions, schisms, tumults, and, so to speak, deadly poisons of discord. Wherefore we all worship the one true God, and believe that he is. But in order that this might be done, by divine admonition I assembled at the city of Nice most of the bishops; with whom I myself also, who am but one of you, and who rejoice exceedingly in being your fellow-servant, undertook the investigation of the truth. ... For that which has commended itself to the judgment of three hundred bishops cannot be other than the doctrine of God; seeing that the Holy Spirit dwelling in the minds of so many dignified persons has effectually enlightened them respecting the Divine will."

(Socrates, pp. 29–30)

Both of these letters present the traditional view, the view Constantine himself obviously believed, that God had ordained his direct intervention in the matter of the Arian controversy. However, the evidence shows Constantine's "investigation of the truth" had little, if anything, to do with Truth. It had everything to do with political objectives and psychological manipulation. Moreover, his investigation into the matter was obviously completed even before he convened the Council. As he saw it, his only remaining task going into the meeting was to, with the help of God, "effectually enlighten" 318 bishops "respecting the Divine will."

Constantine took the decision of the Council to a more definite conclusion by enacting laws to ensure the controversy did not continue:

"This therefore I decree, that if any one shall be detected in concealing a book compiled by Arius, and shall not instantly bring it forward and burn it, the penalty for this offence shall be death; for immediately after conviction the criminal shall suffer capital punishment."

(Socrates, p. 31)

As far as Constantine was concerned, that settled the matter. So much for Christian charity.

After Nicæa

Ironically, the emperor's influence did not achieve the lasting "Christian" unity he desired. The harmony attained through his deft political manipulation and the

ambiguous wording of the Creed were superficial at best. The council members could hardly be unwilling to be "unified" in the presence of the ruler of the Roman Empire. After all, he had provided the meeting place, as well as transportation and lodging. Better yet, he had brought a final end to the persecution of the Church in the East. Agree they did, but as soon as the members returned to their respective churches, the controversy continued unabated.

Later that year, Constantine himself excommunicated and exiled the bishops Eusebius of Nicomedia and Theognis of Nicæa. He took action when he learned they were collaborating with Arians from the Alexandrian church who had encouraged the original controversy. He legitimized his actions by asserting these two had defied the authority of the Council of Nicæa, therefore an additional Church council was not necessary to sentence them:

So I decided to take action about these ungrateful individuals: I ordered them to be arrested and banished to the most distant region possible. Now it is your duty to look to God with that faith which is well known to have existed always, and rightly should exist, and so to act that we may rejoice in the possession of holy, orthodox and philanthropic bishops. And if anyone dares inconsiderately to be roused to remembrance or praise of those corrupters, he will be restrained from his daring by the action of the servant of God, that is to say, of myself. God guard you, beloved brethren.

(Stevenson, p. 374)

It is significant that, on Constantine's authority alone, Eusebius and Theognis were removed from their sees and other bishops more agreeable to the Nicene Creed were installed in their places. Despite such setbacks, the Arian party soon made advances of their own.

In A.D. 327, Eusebius of Cæsarea, who had resumed his pro-Arian stance after the Nicæan Council, presided over another council in Antioch. This council deposed Eustathius of Antioch from his see. When Constantine was informed of the proceedings, he agreed with the decision. Although Eustathius had defended the use of *homoousios* at Nicæa and condemned the heresy of Arius, the charges brought against him were regarding an alleged immoral lifestyle.

Constantine would not tolerate immorality, and since Eustathius did not complain that the real reasons for his excommunication were rooted in a continued disagreement over the “accord” of Nicæa, Constantine considered the issue settled. It was no surprise, however, that the decidedly pro-Arian council, led by Eusebius of Cæsarea, replaced Eustathius with a bishop more agreeable to Arian theology.

As the controversy continued, it became evident to the Arians that the emperor would side with whichever party was able to gain his patronage. Consequently, they began working toward that end. Arius sought readmission to the Church in A.D. 327 by submitting a slightly revised statement of his beliefs (omitting the use of *homoousios*) to Constantine for approval. Constantine pronounced Arius rehabilitated and petitioned another Council, which met at Nicomedia (Constantine also attended), to consider Arius’ case. The council restored Arius to fellowship.

Constantine also allowed Eusebius of Nicomedia to return to his office as bishop since it would be inconsistent to banish supporters of Arius after the heretic himself had been exonerated. By A.D. 328 Eusebius of Nicomedia had even replaced Ossius of Cordova as chief advisor to Constantine. From this you can see that, over the course of two years after the Council of Nicæa, Constantine had completely reversed his views regarding the chief proponents of the Arian controversy. All Arius and Eusebius had to do in return was change what they said about the Creed and thereby give the appearance of Christian unity. Working within the constraints Constantine had imposed, the Arians were able to secure a pro-Arian majority in the Eastern Church by the time of Constantine’s death in A.D. 337.

Conclusion

Although cleverly orchestrated by Constantine, the Council of Nicæa did little to settle the Arian controversy. It was nothing more than an exercise in political compromise designed to achieve the appearance of “Christian” unity that Constantine desired. Constantine’s notion of Christian unity was entirely external. He did not care what Arius or anyone else actually believed. All he cared about was appearances. After all, he had a pagan world to convert to the worship of the one True God. To do that, he had to show them the harmony of God’s People.

For more than fifty years after the Council of Nicæa, the Eastern Church remained divided over the issue of whether Arius’ teaching was orthodox. Keep in mind however, that at this time the Eastern Church considered “orthodox” to *mean* adherence to the teachings of Origen. Therefore, those who sided with Arius accused those who opposed him of Sabellianism. Those who vehemently rejected his teaching charged those who did not concur with polytheism. In the end, the Arian controversy was never settled. The Church merely moved on to other controversies which detracted attention from it.

In A.D. 381 the Council of Constantinople convened to settle other issues and ended up producing the Nicæno-Constantinopolitan Creed, which is today called the Nicene Creed. A close comparison of that creed with the Creed of Nicæa reveals that some of the language intended to combat Arianism was removed. The most notable omissions are the anathemas. The attendees also inserted other language that more clearly described the nature of Christ and the Holy Spirit. (See Table, p. 4.)

So what did Constantine accomplish at Nicæa? Not much more than the subjugation of Church leaders to the political will of a secular leader. The Creed published by that Council attained only a fleeting and superficial unity. It did not even produce a clear definition of orthodoxy because its language was ambiguous enough to let individuals with opposing points of views sign their names with a clear conscience. Since no one changed their beliefs, the battle over orthodoxy was rejoined with renewed vigor as soon as the Council adjourned. Consequently, we are left to wonder whether anyone at Nicæa understood even a *remnant* of *The Apostolic Teaching*.

We do know that Constantine set the course for the development of Church politics from that time forward. Since the Church was obviously no longer in the business of transmitting an accurate understanding of the Truth of Scripture that the Apostles taught, “Truth” became whatever those who had the favor of the government said it was. In other words, after the time of Constantine, political rulers had the ability to define Christian orthodoxy. The next logical step in Satan’s grand scheme of distorting the Truth of Christianity was the creation of the Church State, with the Pope sitting as a religious monarch, presiding over the Holy Roman Empire. We’ll trace those developments in future articles. ■



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 read you a letter we received recently from a prisoner who is also a new Christian. He wrote requesting information concerning what you teach. Here's the letter:

I was recently given your name when I was asking ... where could I ... get the true word of Christ. There are a few people in here that already receive information from you. They explained some of the information that you put out. I was inspired to write you and see ... how I would be able to get some literature from you concerning the true word.

Let me give a brief explanation of what has happened to move me to search for the word of Christ. I was sentenced to 25 years with forfeiture of all pay and allowances back in 1988. I am, or was, married with 4 children. I knew of God and Jesus from my childhood of going to church with my mom. I gradually moved away from Christ and was severely walking against God. I had just recently gotten into a little bit of trouble to where I was held in max{imum} custody until they decided I was guilty. During that time my life started to change, drastically.

My wife said since I decided to get into trouble (before I was found guilty) that she couldn't visit no longer, that she had her needs also, and she was going to find a boyfriend if I could give the permission to. Of course, I couldn't and even got upset about the idea.

Well it didn't seem long that she had a boyfriend that came over every weekend now. Our oldest child didn't like the idea of what she was doing and started rebelling. My wife thought I had put her up to it. During this time a couple of the other children got to where they wouldn't talk to me.

The point is, all this (thank God) caused me to hit rock bottom and I had no where to turn. I had even thought strongly of killing myself. With Jesus' help a guard saw my status and locked me up in Suicide Watch. In Suicide Watch the only thing you are allowed is a Bible, blanket, and a pair of shorts to wear and that's all. I was hurting so bad I couldn't help it. I started reaching for straws for help. That's when I reached for the Bible for help. The first time in my life I actually read the Bible. I even read it from cover to cover. I began praying to God for help and forgiveness. At first, I was scared I was totally out of God's reach because of all my sins. I continued asking for signs to show me if God really did forgive me or was I really banished from God's eyes. I know that was wrong, but something happened and has continued to happen to this day.

You remember I said I had ask for a sign. Well this particular day, after asking for forgiveness and a sign, I went to take a shower. After the shower I was standing in front of the cell to wait for the Sarge to finish what he was doing to take me back to my cell. I don't know if the guard was just kidding around, joking or what, but I took it as a sign. He did what seemed like a double look at me and asked if anything was wrong. I asked the Sarge why. He said something seemed different about me he couldn't place it, but it seemed as if I had a particular glow about me not of light but something different. My heart about jumped out of my body with happiness. From that day on I have continued searching more and more of the word of Jesus so that I can continue to praise and worship him righteously for the rest of my life.

That leads me back to this letter upon my searching for the truth. I was directed your way ... (and) I pray to God there is a way I can get more information on the true word of Jesus. So if you could, please send me some information of where or what I can do to find or get more information on Jesus.

I have recently been able to talk to my children. I was also able to have my mother bring my children up to see me (my wife will not come) but I was able to get my children to understand and also are seeking knowledge. I had only one Bible that was given to me but since my children didn't have a Bible and I could read the one in

church, I gave mine to my child. It is a little hard for her to read but she said she will read it and also read it to the others. My children ... all ask if I find some more Bibles since I can't buy them to send it to them and also made me promise I would teach them more about Jesus that they would also start going to church. I have been praying for the true knowledge of Jesus so that way I will not steer my children wrong. If you have any information that will help them also, please let me know Thank you so very much for listening to me and for your help. May God bless you and be with you always. Praise God.

Editor: In light of the fact that you have personally seen four or five people repent and be born again over the past six months, would you comment on this letter and offer some advice for all new Christians?

Elijah: Sure. I normally have a skeptical reaction when someone tells me they have been "saved" or "born again" because I know full well that the lies Satan has sown in the Church have produced a whole lot of Pretenders who think they have been "saved" but don't know the first thing about what that actually means. I've tried to be skeptical about this account as well. Time may well prove that perhaps I should have, but I just can't hold on to my skepticism because this individual has said several things that indicate the Word is alive and working within him. First of all, he appears to be hungry for the Truth. That's characteristic of a newborn Child of God. Every living thing needs food, including the *Living Word* of God. If he doesn't find and hang on to the Truth however, he'll die spiritually as thousands of others have before.

Second, he says repeatedly he is searching for "the true word of Christ," "the true word," "the truth," "the word of Jesus," "the true word of Jesus," and "the true knowledge of Jesus." Who told him that Truth was central to his salvation, that there was a "true Word" he needed to believe and that he needed someone to teach it to him? The Church will tell him he can just read the Bible and figure it out for himself. How does he know he needs the ministry of a Teacher called of God? Again, I believe it is because the *Living Word* is working within him.

Third, he says he continued to pray for forgiveness and ask for a sign until God in His mercy gave him a sign. I say "God in His mercy," because this

fellow didn't know he was testing God in asking for a sign. God gave him what he sought because he lacked the faith to believe that God would forgive him. However, testing God is not a wise thing for anyone to do, and I assume this fellow realized it after he was born again. He says, "I know that was wrong." Who told him that? I dare say the *Living Word* within him convicted him of that particular sin when He took up residence within.

As far as offering advice to this individual and to all other new Christians, the first thing I would advise them is to stay completely away from the God-forsaken notion of "once saved, always saved." The purpose of that lie is to lull Christians into complacency. Satan has always played the terminology game, trapping people into believing a lie based on a vague understanding of the Scriptures and an imprecise definition of terms. The "once saved, always saved" doctrine is a distortion based on the fact that the new birth is a once-for-all-time experience. However, the new birth is just that—an experience. Salvation is a process. Actually, "saved" does not even accurately convey the *meaning* of the original Hebrew and Greek terms. "Delivered" is a better translation. If a person has been born again, at that point in time they have been "delivered" from Satan's delusion. We say they have been "saved."

However, to attain the Resurrection of the Righteous, a True Believer must see to it that the salvation/deliverance process continues. They must, as the Apostle Paul says, "work out their salvation with fear and trembling." [Editor: Phil. 2:12.] That is not a difficult thing to do if one knows what it involves. It is extremely difficult, if not well nigh impossible, for someone who has no clear understanding of what God requires. That's why Satan's "once saved, always saved" lie trips up so many people.

Contrary to what many would have us believe, all that God requires is FAITH. That's not a new doctrine, is it? The Protestant Reformation was based on that simple declaration: Salvation is by FAITH alone. However, a zealous traditionalist securely snared in Satan's delusion will take that statement and run with it, assuming I'm using the same old worn-out cliché he or she has heard in the Church. That would be a mistake. I'm *talking about* the fact that salvation is attained by maintaining faith in a specific *content*.

Faith is nothing more than belief, and belief must always have a *content*. It is impossible to believe nothing at all. Even a totally confused person believes

that they don't know what to believe. That bit of Truth is extremely important. WHAT one believes, i.e., the *content* of one's faith, is the crucial factor in regard to the doctrine of salvation by faith. We will be saved by believing the Truth. We will not be saved by believing a lie. Nobody has ever been saved by believing a lie! It doesn't work that way! Therefore, the salvation process is nothing more than continuing to believe—to have faith in—the Truth. The only fly in that ointment is the same old fly that flew into Pilate's mouth when he was standing face to face with it: "What is truth?" [Editor: John 18:38.]

I would advise every new Christian, and old Christian too for that matter, to take a long, hard look at everything they hear taught in the Church. If it doesn't have the clear ring of Truth to it, it isn't true. I would also warn them that the primary objective Satan seeks to accomplish in their lives is to see to it that they believe a lie that contradicts some vital Truth of the Gospel. I would then tell them bluntly that God has called me to teach the Truth in these Last Days so that they will be prepared for the Return of Jesus Christ. Whether or not they believe, that does not concern me in the least because I'm just doing what God called me to do.

Editor: You've just been alluding to the fact that spiritual warfare is a struggle between Truth and error. What would you say to someone who says they honestly want to know the Truth?

Elijah: The first thing I would say is they need to determine whether they believe what I teach is true. If they do, they need to get into The Next Step program. The things I teach in *The Voice of Elijah*® and *The Voice of Elijah*® *Update* are true. But the things I teach in The Next Step program are absolutely essential for anyone who has a "love for the truth." [Editor: He's alluding to 2 Thess. 2:10.] While most of those things will eventually be published and distributed in book form, that will most likely be some years down the road. It is a given that Satan is not going to sit idle in the meantime. I know for a fact that lots of folks are going to fall by the wayside for lack of Truth before those things are made public. I can't do anything to change that. What they choose to believe until those things are made public is their responsibility. I intend to do exactly what God has called me to do. And I'm certain I am doing what God would have me do at this time.

The second thing I would say to anyone who thinks they have been born again is they need to read the conversation I had with Mike Clay a few days ago. Mike has been listening to what I teach for fourteen years now and all that time he thought he wanted to know the Truth. What he discovered on December 9, 1994, was a bit surprising. He found he didn't actually want to know the Truth, he just wanted to believe that he wanted to know the Truth. Fortunately for Mike, the forces of *Light* defeated the forces of *Darkness* that controlled him on December 9th. Unfortunately, Satan turned him every which way but loose before that happened.

My conversation with Mike illustrates the dangers inherent in believing lies. Don't be misled. Jesus said Satan is the father of lies. [Editor: John 8:44.] Folks need to understand that the "easy-believism" school of thought must be teaching either Truth or error. Even if those "Christians" are teaching a whole lot of Truth and just a little bit of error, they're still teaching a whole lot of half-truths. The last time I checked, a half-truth was still a whole lie. So you can rest assured Satan has a specific purpose he intends to accomplish through the half-truths taught by "easy-believism" advocates. Having said that, I invite you to examine what Mike said. If it's true, it shoots all kinds of holes in the dumb idea that somehow things have changed since Jesus said:

"Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide, and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter by it. For the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it."

(Matthew 7:13-14)

A Conversation With a (Former) Pharisee

Elijah: Mike, you were just recently born again after struggling with the issue for nearly a year and a half. Why was it so difficult for you to be born again?

Mike: My problem revolved around the fact that I believed lies. Prior to 1988, which is about when you started talking specifically about Pretenders, the primary lie that I was believing told me I had already been saved—that I had a salvation experience with God.

That lie was based on a religious experience I had in 1972.

Elijah: The interesting thing about that is the religious experience itself would lead you to believe that. Tell us about that.

Mike: Well, it happened in a church and it happened in response to some kind of preaching. I don't remember the message that was preached that night specifically. I do know that fear of God was not a part of it.

Elijah: So you were not aware of the wrath of God?

Mike: No.

Elijah: As I recall, you also did not intend to go down to the altar?

Mike: No, I didn't. I had been discussing Jesus Christ with some "Christians" prior to that night, but a lot of that was just a cerebral exercise: "How do you know that Jesus Christ is not 'the way' if you don't give Him a chance?" That kind of a thing.

Elijah: Pseudo-intellectualism?

Mike: Yeah. They had been presenting the Gospel to me as an alternative lifestyle that I ought to choose, and they argued that I could not discount it if I had not tried it. That was the basic idea. My life at the time was not going anywhere because of my psychological dependence on drugs, so I had run out of any other options. I was already considering "giving Jesus a chance" before I went to church that night.

Elijah: So you were at a dead end. How old were you?

Mike: Eighteen.

Elijah: Only eighteen! And you didn't know where else to turn? So that's why you "turned to Jesus"?

Mike: I could have just as easily turned to a twelve step program.

Elijah: You could have gone into Buddhism?

Mike: Yeah. I could have gone into anything.

Elijah: You could have gone into anything because you didn't actually believe that there was a God? You just chose the closest available thing and said "I'll believe this—it sounds good"? You were just buying into whatever message these people were preaching? You didn't necessarily even need an experience with God?

Mike: That's right. But the thing that clinched it was the experience I had that night. I can see now that it happened because I was also seeking some kind of physical experience. I wanted some kind of overwhelming experience to validate that whatever I was getting into was going to be good. But you must understand my whole life up to then was centered around what felt good.

Elijah: Sensuality, hedonism, whatever appealed to the flesh?

Mike: Yes, of course. So the experience that night was extremely sensual. I did not take a drug, there was no external substance involved, but the experience was extremely physical.

Elijah: So did any type of emotional buildup prepare you for this?

Mike: There was a gospel group that sang prior to the preaching of the message. I think I was more taken with the emotion whipped up through the singing and the testimonies of the gospel group ...

Elijah: You *mean* "feeling good"?

Mike: Absolutely. ... and all of this "love of Jesus for you" and "how grateful I am for what Jesus has done for me" in the songs and the emotion. That really had me primed.

Elijah: So nobody was preaching sin and salvation? It was not a matter of you being a sinner, it was a matter of "Come and try Jesus and it will be all right"?

Mike: That's right.

Elijah: So there was no "Repent and believe the Gospel." It was just "Come on and have a good time"?

Mike: Basically.

Elijah: Nobody talked to you about repentance?

Mike: No way!

Elijah: Is that incredible? Nobody said a thing to you about repentance?

Mike: Sin? I can't remember specifically, but sin was sort of presented as just an obstacle in the way of pursuing the better life. There was absolutely nothing involved in what I heard that required me to take a hard look at why I was in the state I was in, and what a sinful person I was. No, not at all.

Elijah: In other words, the message you heard was all about what Jesus will do for you? You are not involved except to just say "okay"?

Mike: That's right.

Elijah: So there was absolutely no conviction of the Holy Spirit? There was no concern for the sin in your life—how sinful you were? There was no emphasis on the fact you have sinned against God?

Mike: None.

Elijah: None of that? Not a bit? Okay, so you went on for how long before you heard what I was teaching?

Mike: I was "saved" in October of 1972 and I met you in February of 1981. So nine years?

Elijah: What was going through your mind during all that time?

Mike: I was pursuing a "Christian" ministry. I was "serving God." Everything was great. I was a "Christian."

Elijah: "Serving God?" What did that *mean* to you at that time?

Mike: I don't think I gave it all that much thought. It meant that I was committed to this new life I had found. It had nothing to do with a personal relationship to God. None of my personal characteristics had changed at all. I still wanted to be in the limelight—be in front of people feeling good. I saw what the "ministry of the Gospel" was all about and I knew if I went into the ministry I could have all of those things. I could be up front in charge. People would see that I knew what was happening. I could be a teacher. I could have all of the honor and congratulations.

Part of my thinking was influenced by the lie that God has this special plan in mind for every Christian. "Follow God and great things will happen in your life. If you just allow God to use you, everything will be great. God will use you in a mighty way. You'll be right up there with"—and then they present Gospel figures in the past and some of them were people who I had no idea what they stood for. People like Charles Finney and John Wesley. But then they would mix in people who are more recent 20th-century figures like Billy Graham, Jimmy Swaggart, people like that. I wanted that. That was extremely attractive to me. So I got on the fast track in the ministry. All I wanted was the credentials that would allow me to have that.

Elijah: So you started looking at educational degrees as some sort of sheepskin you could hang on the wall? That's why you went into the Masters program? Just so you could say you had better credentials than somebody else?

Mike: That's exactly right. So I could say, "You better listen to me. I know better."

Elijah: That's it? That's the only reason?

Mike: Yeah. Now, if you had asked me why I was doing it at the time I would have responded with a bunch of clichés about how wonderful God has been in my life and how He is the answer for the world and I want to serve God and all. That would have been my answer then, but knowing now who I really was and knowing what God has led me to, I can look back and tell you what I just said about my motives.

Elijah: Looking back now, can you say that anybody attending the “Christian” schools you attended was doing it to learn the Truth?

Mike: To learn the Truth?

Elijah: You got it: To learn the Truth.

Mike: There may have been one or two people. I recall running into some people who made me uncomfortable because I could not force myself on them. I couldn’t impress them or make them see where I was headed. They were generally quiet people. They didn’t have much input. They seemed to be keeping to themselves. They made me uncomfortable so I steered away from them. I didn’t see them in anybody’s group doing anything. They kind of kept to themselves and, now that I think about it, they had kind of a bewildered look on their faces. They were probably trying to figure out where the people who loved God were. I don’t know.

Elijah: You said earlier that you did not change after you were “saved.” But you did stop taking drugs?

Mike: Yeah, I did.

Elijah: However, you weren’t hooked on any drug that was physically addictive, were you?

Mike: No, I was not.

Elijah: Still I assume you claimed that as proof that God had “saved” you? Did you use that in your testimony, telling everybody you quit “cold turkey”? Did you build this big lie so everybody would think God did this wonderful thing in your life?

Mike: Yeah, I did.

Elijah: Let’s talk about the experience you had when you got “saved.” People need to understand that if Satan has done this in your life, he has most likely done something similar in the lives of thousands, perhaps millions, of other people. By that I mean he has used a metaphysical experience to “prove” something that has absolutely no validity whatsoever. Yet people are buying into his deception by the millions today. In

your case he was able to do it because nobody ever told you that you needed to repent, and you weren’t under the conviction of the Holy Spirit. So he just grabbed you and was evidently intending to use you in the same way he has used thousands of “Christian” ministers down through the centuries—all to build his big lie. You were willing to testify to the great things God had done in your life when there were no great things at all except you had some kind of metaphysical experience. So what was the experience?

Mike: Well, the service came to a conclusion at the end of the preacher’s sermon—and again I don’t remember the content of that sermon at all. Not at all. I just remember that he made an appeal for anyone who wanted to “come to Christ,” and I think that was the language he used: “Come to Christ,” or maybe “be saved.” It certainly wasn’t “repent of your sins.” He may have gone so far as to say “if you want to get saved, come to the front, to the altar.”

I was in an emotional state by this time, feeling physically some kind of oppression. There was a heavy pressure in my chest and it was even becoming difficult for me to breathe. I remember that I just wanted to get up and get outside where I could get some air. The preacher made his appeal and I got up, heading for the center aisle, thinking that I was going to go out the doors. I wanted out of the place. But for some reason I just changed my mind. I can’t remember thinking it through and changing my mind. I just went the opposite direction.

I went to the front and knelt down at the altar. Immediately people were all around me putting their hands on me and praying for me. I distinctly remember one old guy who had been sitting in the front row throughout that service frequently shouting out “amen” and “hallelujah.” He walked around to the front of the altar and held my hands up. The pressure in my chest became more intense and I began to cry and say, “God help me.” That is as far as it went.

Elijah: Okay? What happened then?

Mike: I knew something wasn’t right in my life. I was in a terrible state. That’s why I said, “God help me.” I immediately felt a sensation as though bands of iron were being broken from around my chest. The pressure within was suddenly being released and a

feeling of lightness—if I could describe it, it was almost like bubbling water or something, a coolness associated with light—started to fill me from the inside. The reason I say light is because even though my eyes were closed I felt that an intense white light was filling my field of view all around me.

This old guy who was holding my hands faded way into the background, and even though he was shouting “glory hallelujah” to beat the band, that became very faint and all the people praying and shouting went way into the distance. Then a sudden calmness came over me. Instead of this old guy standing in front of me, there was a being full of light telling me that everything was okay now, not so much in audible words, but when he appeared I suddenly felt that everything was okay. It’s going to be okay from now on. Everything will be different.

Elijah: Let me ask you this. In all the time from that point until you actually came to the Lord a few weeks ago, did what Paul said about Satan being a messenger of light ever occur to you? [Editor: 2 Cor. 11:14.] Was that ever even a consideration?

Mike: No, not until July of 1993. I read that, heard that, even preached it, and never once considered that it might apply to my experience.

Elijah: So you firmly believed Satan’s lie?

Mike: You bet I did!

Elijah: Keep in mind all those other people like you out there when you answer this next question, because they are still firmly in Satan’s bondage. You believed Satan’s lie beyond any shadow of a doubt?

Mike: Yeah. I think I did it because I was into sensuality. That was such an intense experience, yet it had nothing to do with my taking a substance. It happened totally other than that. But I should add that I had gone into other spiritual pursuits looking for a metaphysical experience. I had tried meditation and a couple of other things.

Elijah: And you were looking for something in the flesh—something sensual?

Mike: Yeah. At the time I would not have used those terms. But that was what I was into.

Elijah: How recently had you taken drugs when you went to this church service?

Mike: I had not taken any drugs for a couple of weeks because I was determined I was going to give this Jesus they talked about an honest chance. I felt the only way to do that was to not get loaded for a while, to be straight and see what happened. So a couple of weeks prior I had gotten rid of what drugs I had, and I was praying every day that God would compensate me for giving up drugs. Oh, and I had also heard about the experience these people called the “baptism in the Holy Spirit.” I had no idea what that was but that’s what I wanted. Understand, this group of folks considered this to be a work of grace separate from salvation. I wanted the whole thing. That was what I was praying for.

Elijah: And none of them ever told you that the way that you gain salvation according to the Scriptures is by repenting and believing the Gospel? They never once mentioned that?

Mike: No way! No, they didn’t.

Elijah: So those poor deluded folks sold you a bill of goods? That is, they had heard about these things, but they didn’t have personal possession of any of them? Then here comes this messenger of light telling you wonderful things and you bought it?

Mike: Yeah.

Elijah: All right, let’s talk a bit about how firmly you believed those lies, and what other lies you believed down through the years.

Mike: Because I believed that what happened in 1972 was a valid experience with God, I started to add a lot of other garbage to it. Next to the lie that told me I was born again, the worst lie I believed was that I had been called into the ministry. I went to Bible college and told everybody I was called of God.

Elijah: Why did you say that?

Mike: Because I wanted to be called. Nothing had ever occurred in my life that equated with anything that you read in Scripture where an individual is called by God. Nothing like that ever happened.

Elijah: But your uncle didn't tell you, like one well-known preacher said his did? I'm being facetious!

Mike: No, my uncle didn't tell me. But a lot of the teaching that I heard back then had to do with the gifts of the Spirit. That teaching said that if you have certain attributes—certain personality traits—God would use those because He gave them to you in the first place. Since He means for you to be a certain way, you are called to be this, that, or the other. I believed that because I really wanted to be up front. I wanted to be the man in charge.

Elijah: You wanted recognition?

Mike: Absolutely.

Elijah: Sort of like the Pharisees?

Mike: Absolutely like the Pharisees. I definitely wanted the sound of the trumpet before I gave my alms. That was what I was like.

Elijah: Okay. So what was this calling?

Mike: I believed I was called to teach.

Elijah: Let me get this straight. You had no experience with God; nothing that told you, you were called. You just wanted to be called, so you said you were called and that was it?

Mike: And I soon believed it heartily.

Elijah: So how many "ministers of God" do you believe are out there in exactly that same position? Three hundred? Four hundred?

Mike: How about maybe millions? All of the people that I hung out with were that way. Everybody had their "calling." Mind you, a year after I had this spiritual experience I was in a Bible college, and everybody had their "testimony" to tell. Everybody was there

because God "called" them. Some even had a story like mine.

Elijah: Except for those few quiet people?

Mike: Except for those quiet people who had nothing to say. Anybody who had something to say had something similar to my story to tell. So we were all there in Bible college "called of God" to get the credentials we needed so we could go out and fulfill our "calling."

Elijah: So did they ever mention repenting and believing the Gospel while you were in Bible college?

Mike: No, not really. You had to discuss it in theology class. Sin and salvation are a part of systematic theology. But the discussion was purely academic. There was never a challenge for any of us to examine whether our own experience was valid.

Elijah: How many people did you know in Bible college who were living the life of the average sinner out on the street?

Mike: I couldn't count.

Elijah: There were a lot of them?

Mike: There were a lot of them.

Elijah: I assume you had to go to chapel services. Yet nobody at this Bible college was preaching sin and salvation; nobody exhorting anyone to repent and believe the Gospel? They just assumed everybody was a Christian because they all attended a "Christian" college?

Mike: Yeah. There was a strong sense that everyone was a Christian even if some were out there doing things they shouldn't do. You've heard that term *backslider*?

Elijah: So they were all backslidden!

Mike: That was the general view. We're all backslidden, and if we'll just turn around and come back, God will accept us. There was a lot of talk about what Christians ought to do.

Elijah: If we say we know better, it will be all right?

Mike: There was plenty of talk that “Christians” should be a certain way and do certain things. If anything, that would shame you into doing certain things because you knew you should. But there wasn’t any real talk about the need to repent. Initially, I’m sure, everybody came in with some belief concerning their own salvation experience.

Elijah: Okay, so everybody had something they looked to as the time when they were “saved,” “came to the Lord,” “gave their life to Jesus,” whatever. Let’s talk about the other lies you believed.

Mike: I don’t really know where this next lie came in, but I eventually came to believe the lie that told me nothing is as bad as it seems and everything is gonna work out fine. That lie probably came from hearing constant testimonies and stories with people quoting the passage in Romans 8 that says all things work together for good to those who are called of God. So I would look at everything that happened in my life, even if it was momentarily unpleasant, as some positive thing that was meant to better prepare me, that down the line it was going to pay off and turn into a good thing.

So I never looked at anything that happened as something that might be trying to tell me I was in serious trouble with God or needed to change something in my life. I never looked at anything that way, even though I had some incredibly unpleasant experiences. There was always this lie that told me: “It isn’t as bad as you think. Keep a positive attitude. Hang in there and this will all work out.” So God could never really challenge me to honestly evaluate my life, where I was, and the possibility that something was wrong and I needed to change.

Elijah: But there were times when you would try to get out of your “backslidden” state?

Mike: I never felt the term *backslidden* applied to me. I never got into any of the sensual sins—drunkenness, fornication—that we “Christians” associated with being “backslidden.” Plus, I attended church regularly. But there were times when I would recognize that my life did not reflect what I knew a Christian life should be.

Elijah: So there were fleeting moments of honesty?

Mike: Yeah. I guess so. But even then I was quick to go back and hide in the lies. When I would see what I was and admit I was not exactly what I should be, I would rationalize and tell myself: “I’m growing in the Lord, and I want to be where I should be. That’s good enough. If I hang in there, eventually I will be there.”

Elijah: What did that *mean* to you: “Growing in the Lord”? That’s a cliché I hear a lot. Does that just *mean* you grow older in the Lord?

Mike: Maybe it did. For me it meant I needed to know more because for me knowledge was power. If I knew more than most of the people in the room ...

Elijah: You could impress them with your great knowledge and wisdom?

Mike: Them and myself. Myself more than anybody, that’s for sure. I was also willing to believe that meant that I was somehow okay. If I had some great nugget of knowledge to impart and other people at least said they got something out of it, that was great! If they said, “Thank you for that testimony or that bit of teaching, brother,” then I felt I was okay. Boy, I had really helped them! I was “growing in the Lord.”

Elijah: So the ritual of getting up in front and testifying or preaching or whatever you did, and then being patted on the back for being the good little Pharisee you were, that *meant* a lot to you?

Mike: Yeah, it did.

Elijah: That was what you lived for?

Mike: Yeah, it was.

Elijah: So what other lies were you hanging on to tenaciously?

Mike: I have to start looking at things after 1981, because after I started to hear the bits and pieces of The Teaching that you were teaching in 1981, I started to believe other lies. I believed the things you taught as far as what you saw in Scripture, what you believed

God was doing in these days and what God had called you to do. I didn't have any trouble accepting any of those things, although I can't now say why. I used to believe the lie that I was okay with God because I saw those things as true. Even when it became more evident to me how much my life was contrary to the Truth, I still held on to the fact that I believed what I was hearing. The lie was: I believe these things—that must account for something.

I held on to the lie that told me the experience from 1972 was a valid salvation experience up until July 1993. I continued to believe I was called to the ministry until you openly challenged those you were teaching in late 1981 or early 1982. That was when you challenged us to consider whether or not we had been called because you understood that those you taught were not to teach what you were teaching. So you told us that if some of us thought we were called to teach or preach or something we should go do whatever we thought we were called to do. You told us our calling certainly wasn't to teach or to preach what you were teaching.

Elijah: Because I told you that I had not been called to prepare anybody to minister?

Mike: That's right. I was still one of a larger group of students from Bible college who thought they had callings on their lives. All of those people turned back because they couldn't reconcile those two things. They turned back and went on to pursue their "ministry." But I understood enough of what I had heard that I couldn't turn back. I could not reconcile the two but I believed what you were teaching enough to say I was not called. The funny part is, I still figured there was some special way that God was going to use me, therefore I could say that if I had not been called as a teacher, then God intended me to be around to have some part in what you are doing. In the back of my mind was the lie that said, "I'm sure I'll play a great part."

Elijah: You were still thinking that somewhere along the way you were going to get the recognition you craved?

Mike: That's right, and I think that's what kept me around all the way up until 1994.

Elijah: Are you serious?

Mike: Absolutely! There were times when I was confronted with my sin and it was really hard for me to say that my life lined up with the Truth—that I had any commendable motives at all. I was doing some amazingly self-serving things—irresponsible things—as far as they affected what you were trying to do or how they affected other people who were trying to learn what you were teaching. But that, coupled with the belief that I had a valid salvation experience, kept me around. I figured there had to be some payoff here eventually. I am a Christian, after all, so I just need to hang in here and try to work this through. That was the thing. I felt that somehow I could work this through. I would be what I was supposed to be. I just needed to do better.

Elijah: It was all external? I'll just do this, that, or the other and it will all work out?

Mike: Yeah!

Elijah: So you never actually looked at who you were—WHAT YOU BELIEVED?

Mike: No.

Elijah: You *mean* to tell me you never looked at WHAT YOU BELIEVED all during the time that I was telling you the important thing is WHAT YOU BELIEVE? I was telling you that it is not WHAT YOU DO but WHAT YOU BELIEVE, yet you were still consistently thinking WHAT YOU DO is what counts?

Mike: Yeah! Yeah! But part of what made me so stubborn in sticking to that is because I didn't realize how firmly I believed that WHAT YOU DO matters.

Elijah: You have to do certain things, like keep the Ten Commandments, so WHAT YOU DO must matter?

Mike: Yeah. And even though you would say it doesn't matter WHAT YOU DO, that WHAT YOU BELIEVE determines what you do, in the back of my mind there would be something that said, "no, there is something more to that." In the back of my mind every time you said that Satan was whispering ...

Elijah: Oh, yeah! Satan hates that little bit of Truth. The minute anyone says “it is not WHAT YOU DO, it’s WHY YOU DO IT,” or “it is not WHAT YOU DO it’s WHAT YOU BELIEVE,” Satan comes in big time. And the first time anyone hears that Truth they are automatically going to come back saying, “No, that can’t be true!” They do that because the belief that WHAT YOU DO matters is a central part of the big lie that Satan has firmly ingrained in the mind of everyone. The arguments inevitably come up anytime I teach that Truth, so it is not surprising to me you would hear it contradicted in your mind. It is surprising to me that you would continue listening to *The Teaching* as long as you did without being able to see that you weren’t born again. That’s surprising. What other lies did you believe?

Mike: By 1988, when you started openly talking about Pretenders, and especially after 1990, when you started writing the newsletter and the monthly *Updates*, my lack of conformity to how a Christian should be became harder and harder for me to ignore. Eventually I got to the point where I began to despair that I could ever get it right. Yet I was still trying to get it right, or rather, to do it right.

Elijah: Your despair was stemming from the fact that you thought you were born again and yet you could not be what I said a Christian should be? You couldn’t be what you knew you should be, so that created an incredible conflict?

Mike: Yeah. It did.

Elijah: Obviously! An unsaved person cannot be what a saved person can be, and I can see how an unsaved person who believed that they were saved would experience a tremendous conflict even trying. That person could end up in a mental institution.

Mike: I have to say that is when life became miserable for me—mentally.

Elijah: Really?

Mike: Well, I had gone kind of bopping along without thinking up until 1988 even though there were some big confrontations because of things that I was doing. I would have some mental anguish getting

through those things until I was able to convince myself I was all right with God. Then I would stop worrying about it and feel like everything was okay again until another difficulty came along.

Elijah: Time heals all wounds?

Mike: Time would heal all wounds—exactly! But when *The Teaching* started coming out in greater detail in the late 1980s and into 1990 when you started writing, it became impossible for me to ignore it anymore. My mind was almost always in turmoil. I was constantly being faced with the fact that I didn’t line up with the Truth and I would ask: Why not? Why not? Why can’t I? What is the problem? I want this! I believe this! I believe what I’m hearing is the Truth!

Elijah: And “I’m saved, so I should be able ...”

Mike: And I’m saved so why am I so obviously not saved? That is when the big lie that kept me quiet for a few more years crept in. That was the one that said: “It’s because you have committed the unpardonable sin. You have grieved the Holy Spirit because of your consistent sinning, and now you cannot be saved. You are destined for destruction.” That one had me in a tailspin.

Elijah: Satan must have figured that would keep you shut up for a long time.

Mike: And it did! It did! That lie reigned supreme for three or four years until July 1993 when circumstances forced me to look at it honestly. Then I could see God had allowed those circumstances.

Elijah: You’re *talking about* the dreams you had?

Mike: Yeah.

Elijah: Can you honestly tell me that it had never occurred to you that you might not be saved until you had a dream and I told you I think this is what the dream is trying to tell you?

Mike: I suspected earlier that year that maybe I had not actually been saved, but I did not want to consider that as being true. So I would not dwell on it.

Elijah: And the reason was because of the intensity of the experience that you had? The memory of that experience would drive you right back under?

Mike: That experience was so incredible that it was impossible for me to deny it. I know now what happened. But it wasn't until you explained more and more about the role that the conviction of the Holy Spirit and honest repentance should play—must play—in a person's salvation experience that I had to take a look at the experience I had back then and honestly evaluate it. I could not ignore the facts any longer.

Elijah: So that is then when you admitted that you had not been born again?

Mike: Yeah.

Elijah: That's terrific! But how many times did you say you were born again from July 4, 1993, until December 9, 1994?

Mike: I've lost count. It was maybe half a dozen.

Elijah: Really? You'd say you were born again, then come back and say that you had not been born again?

Mike: Yeah.

Elijah: The thing about this that is so chilling, Mike, is the fact that your first "salvation" experience happened to you in a church when you responded to an altar call!

Mike: Yep.

Elijah: How many people do you think are out there worshiping Satan because they have believed his lie about Who God is? They don't know the God Who is, so they are worshiping a god who does not even exist! Satan has them involved in demon worship, seeking fleshly gratification in church. That's all it is! They are going to church to be gratified in the flesh. Satan has them believing his lies, and these people are locked in because they have never once heard the Truth that you have to repent and believe the Gospel to be saved. That you have to repent! That honest

repentance is the first step! They don't know that. They've never been taught that. So these poor dupes are going to church, thinking they are worshiping God; and God doesn't accept their worship because they have a distorted view of Who He is.

Unfortunately, all those Pretenders are mingling with True Believers in churches everywhere, enticing them to join in their hypocrisy. True Believers, on the other hand, don't know that these people are worshipping a false god. They are believing the lie that tells them everybody who says they are "Christian" has actually been born again in the same way that they have. So Satan has them all locked in together.

What is so phenomenal to me about all that is the fact that over the past year and a half I saw you struggling to get free from Satan's lies and I couldn't understand why it was so difficult. At times I was almost to the point of considering the possibility that demon possession was involved. It astounded me when you first mentioned your fear about the unpardonable sin. I couldn't believe you had not heard what I had taught. Now I can see why. Layer upon layer of lies had locked you in so that you couldn't extract yourself. You've said your struggle was because you couldn't get free from this lie, that lie, and the other lie. So can you look at the past year and a half and tell us what other lies had to be removed?

Mike: Sure. Between July 4, 1993, and late January 1994 I was locked back into believing that I had a valid salvation experience on July the Fourth, even though some profound things happened along the way that made me doubt that.

Elijah: Okay. So what was the July 4 experience?

Mike: That was being able to openly recognize and admit that I had been a Pretender for twenty-one years.

Elijah: So you thought that admitting you had been a Pretender was a valid salvation experience. You thought all it took to be born again was saying, "Oh yeah, I'm willing to admit that I'm a Pretender, so now I am going to be saved." That's all it took? Just saying, "Now I am going to be saved"?

Mike: That's it! "Now it's okay. I'm going to be saved."

Elijah: So you thought your verbal statement that you wanted to be saved *meant* you were saved and everything was going to be just fine from then on? It wasn't a matter of an internal witness of any kind? It was just a matter of "I'll say this, and it will be what I say it is"?

Mike: Yeah. And looking back at it now, I can see that God made me look at the evidence against me through dreams and your open confrontation. I say God made me look at it because I assume those circumstances were engineered to bring the Truth to my attention—so I could not deny it.

Also, emotion played a part in the July 4 experience. When I finally was able to recognize and admit I had been a Pretender, there was an immediate release and I started to cry and ask God to forgive me for being such a fool. I figured it was done, but that very night I had a dream where God showed me my back yard. Half of it was nice and newly-mown and clean as a whistle, but the other half was overgrown with weeds and thistles and garbage.

The very next morning I began to doubt. What does this mean? What does a half-mown lawn mean? I can't be half-saved. What does this mean? Then you said something to me about how my whole life I have only halfway done things, that I have never taken anything to completion. That was a valid admonition for me to hear, but I was only too willing to accept that as the interpretation of the dream. I know now that God was telling me I had started something but hadn't finished it.

Elijah: He was trying to tell you that admitting you were a Pretender didn't automatically *mean* that you were saved?

Mike: Right. Within the next four to six weeks there were two other very vivid dreams that just reinforced that point. He was trying to tell me, "Look! It's not done!" But I was already going off hootin' and hol-lerin'. I didn't want to hear. At the time I was still the editor of the newsletter. I was writing articles for *The Update*; some of them relating my experience of salvation. I was thinking: "How great it is now that I understand! Other people can learn from my experience!" Along with that lie, Satan resurrected the lie that said God had some special "calling" for me.

Elijah: So then you went back to listening to the good old lies—the ones that made you feel good?

Mike: Yep. And I did that all through the fall and into the winter. But again it was a confrontation with you because of an article I had started to write for the February 1993 *Update* that made me look at where I was. That article was really off the wall. Basically, it was me trying to ...

Elijah: Trying to impress people?

Mike: ... exhort people to a greater commitment and all this garbage. Yes, I wanted to impress them.

Elijah: Back to your old ways?

Mike: Yeah. Exactly. You drew my attention to that, and again I had to look and admit that things were not right. Then I looked back at the dreams I had dreamed and I knew I had not repented. I now had to admit that I was still not a Christian. I was still not a Christian!

Elijah: This was in January?

Mike: Late January, early February. So now I was really in a quandary, because I had already done all of that stuff since July 4, yet I still wasn't a Christian! What was the problem? What was missing? It was from late January to December 9 of this year that I was looking for this elusive answer. What's missing? What's the problem?

Elijah: And you were still looking for something physical?

Mike: At first it was a physical thing because I admitted to myself and to you in a couple of conversations I had with you in February that I was crooked and vile and I saw all of the terrible things that I was doing and I wanted to repent. And, of course, saying: "God forgive me! God forgive me! God forgive me!" That was in my mind all the time until I thought I had reached some new crisis experience. Then I would go for a few days thinking that I had repented and now it was okay. But then I would sin and start all over again. For me, sin was simply a matter of putting

myself forward in a conversation as knowing something or being something special.

Elijah: So Satan had you locked down so that any little thing that you did was a sin in your eyes. We are not *talking about* the Ten Commandments that God gave. We're *talking about* the Pharisaic notions of right and wrong. You've got these beliefs in there telling you this is sin, that is sin, and the other is sin, and Satan has you in bondage to condemnation. That's what was happening during that time?

Mike: Yeah.

Elijah: He was condemning you for anything and everything. I assume his purpose was so you would not feel the conviction of the Holy Spirit. He wanted to override the conviction of the Holy Spirit with condemnation. That's a novel tactic! The Holy Spirit tells you "this is right and that's wrong," but He is only going to convict you on the basis of things that are legitimate sin. He's not going to convict you for things that are not sin according to anybody's logical definition of sin. But you were feeling condemnation for all kinds of things. And then, what? Satan was using that to tell you that you weren't saved?

Mike: Right! How could I possibly be a Christian if I do this? So I must not be saved. Then I'd start all over again: "Well then, if I'm not saved, God, I want to be." And off we go again. Eventually, I began to feel that it was absolutely impossible for me to ever come to God and be saved.

Elijah: Over the past two or three years I have watched people—"Christian" folks like yourself who have been told they were saved and they believed it, in much the same way you were told you were saved, and you believed it—I've seen those people come out of Satan's fog, out of their Pharisaic notions, and be born again. Confusion is the one thing I have seen in every one of them as they came to God. When did the confusion set in with you?

Mike: I think the confusion started in late January or February when I had to admit that what happened on July 4 was not a conversion experience. And from then on I was trying to determine what was true,

because that's what I wanted. I wanted to be saved.

Elijah: You wanted to be forgiven but you couldn't figure out why you weren't forgiven?

Mike: That's right. I wanted to be forgiven. But I was still holding onto those Pharisaic notions of Christianity. They were firmly entrenched in my mind all the way up until December 9th, when you and I talked.

Elijah: Really? So you're telling me all the lies ... and I'm not saying that everything in the Church is a lie, I'm just saying that the lies that are in the Church were the things that kept you from being born again? That holding onto those lies kept you from believing the Truth?

Mike: Yeah! Yeah! That's true!

Elijah: Those lies! It wasn't the Truth that was in the Church. It was the lies that were in the Church.

Mike: You betcha!

Elijah: Now it needs to be stated that we aren't saying anything new. Satan has obviously sown lies in the Church. Everybody knows two contradictory doctrines can't be true, so only a fool would argue against the assertion that there must be lies of one kind or the other in the Church. We're just saying the thing that keeps people from being born again, and the thing that brings on the confusion when they get close to being born again, are the lies that are in the Church.

So tell me what kind of lies are we *talking about*, so that people out there who think, "maybe I'm a Pretender" can better wrestle with the confusion they will experience as they try to come to the Lord. What are some of the lies they need to consider?

Mike: Okay. Recently, in The Teaching on one of The Next Step tapes ..., you talked about the parable of the new wine in the old wineskins and the patch of new cloth on the old garment. I heard that little bit of teaching after December 9, just a day or two after, and when I heard that, it made a different sense to me than it ever did all the years I had heard and read and considered that passage before.

Elijah: Why was that?

Mike: Because I held onto this lie that said “You can determine what you need to do to serve God through your understanding of this Teaching, or the Scriptures, or through whatever.” The lie is that you’re going to be able to put it all together and figure everything out for yourself. Until December 9, I could not accept the fact that I had to let all that garbage go, and start by saying “I don’t know diddly squat about anything except the fact I’m going to die and go to Hell if God doesn’t save me, and there’s not a thing I can bring to this party except that I’m really sorry for the sinner that I am.”

Elijah: So, in other words, you finally understood you’ve got to get down to basics?

Mike: Yeah!

Elijah: And I assume that you didn’t want to get down to basics?

Mike: I didn’t ...

Elijah: You wanted to start from where you were?

Mike: Yeah, exactly.

Elijah: But God says: “No, you can’t go past ‘Go.’ You can’t collect \$200. You must go directly to jail. Then we’ll deal with your sad situation.”

Mike: The school of thought, or the trend, that I adhered to in the Church was the intellectual approach to the Gospel. Okay? Because we’re smart, intelligent beings, we believe this Truth. I know now that there’s a despicable pride at the heart of that belief that says, “We’re smart, intelligent beings.” I just didn’t realize what an absolute moron I had been the forty years of my life. I couldn’t accept that.

Elijah: You couldn’t admit that? You couldn’t admit that you were a fool and a blind man like Jesus said?

Mike: No way. I could say it, but I didn’t believe it.

Elijah: You wouldn’t accept it?

Mike: I wouldn’t accept it, and again, I’m so thankful for the way God has worked out the circumstances of my life. Because from February until December 9, 1994, I was continually trying to make it work by believing the lie that I knew something. I knew I didn’t know everything, but I thought if I could just figure out this one more thing, I could be saved and I could follow God. I believed that all the way up until December 9. I know I was a blubbering idiot when I called you on the phone that night, because God had engineered circumstances, and Satan had been beating on me so hard, that I was literally ready to just check into the local mental hospital. I hadn’t been able to function for weeks. I spent a lot of my waking hours with this raging debate in my head.

Elijah: Because you were totally confused?

Mike: So confused, yeah. I could not even perform the simplest tasks without it taking great effort.

Elijah: And you’re telling me the total confusion came in because Satan had you convinced that you had something that God must value?

Mike: Yes! Absolutely!

Elijah: So you didn’t understand when Paul says “Not by works of righteousness that we have done”? That Paul is *talking about* “works of righteousness,” and the only way you can get righteousness is by *WHAT YOU BELIEVE*? So he’s saying, “No work that you do because of anything that you believe before you believe the Gospel is going to do anything at all to save you.” Yet you still wanted to bring your own righteousness to this party?

Mike: My own old wineskin.

Elijah: Are you aware that I taught about the old wineskin on an earlier tape?

Mike: Did you?

Elijah: Yeah.

Mike: (laughs in delight)

Elijah: So Tape 18 is the first time that you heard about the new wineskin? After December 9 is the first time that you heard anything at all about this new concept, yet I taught that on Tape 4?

Mike: It didn't hit me.

Elijah: I talked about exactly the same thing on Tape 4 and you couldn't understand what I said?

Mike: You know what's funny about that is I sat over that tape with a razor blade, editing what you said. I listened to every word.

Elijah: Is that right?

Mike: Well, no, now that I think about it, I wasn't paying attention on Tape 4. I wasn't doing it right. I was skipping around. It was totally disorganized.

Elijah: Oh, I know. The earlier tapes, especially Tape 4, are a real mess. But we'll fix it.

Mike: Anyway, I could not turn loose of the notion that I had something God wanted. But by December 9, ... You have to understand, I really couldn't function even in the normal things of everyday life by then. It was so hard to go to work and do things that I knew how to do, I'd sit and stare ...

Elijah: Okay, let me ask you this. When people actually start hearing what I'm saying, there are going to be those who go into exactly the same confused state that you were in, but they are going to come out the other side with exactly the opposite result. Can you imagine experiencing the confusion and not being born again because you weren't able to give up the lies? Then people say: "Look at so-and-so over there. Look at what this guy's teaching did to them." They aren't going to see it wasn't what I taught them. It was what Satan taught them. It was the lies the person chose to believe. I told them the Truth and they went into mental confusion; but they couldn't break the bonds of Satan by letting go of everything they have ever believed and going back to square one, which is what you did when you said, "I don't know everything, but I do know this." Can you imagine what people are going to say? They're going to say, "This guy's teaching is destroying people!"

Mike: That is exactly the garbage that was going through my mind! I was hearing that! "You've got to get away from this man. He's done nothing but twist and turn your life for fourteen years. You've been miserable ever since you met him. Get away from him! As soon as you get away from him and get on with your life, everything's going to be fine. Just drop this nonsense and stop this. You've been beating yourself over the head for years. God accepts you." I mean I was hearing this stuff constantly, and it was louder than ever that night.

Elijah: Really?

Mike: As I was driving home! That's what drove me to the phone! I called you because I believed that what I was hearing that night was not true.

Elijah: You're talking about what you were hearing from Satan?

Mike: Yeah. I heard it, but I didn't believe it. I knew that for me to give in to what Satan was screaming by that point—it was almost audible in my ears—to give in to that was the same as taking a gun to my head. But I was so tied up and locked in. I thought: "I want free of this, and I don't know what to do. I know that I'm hearing lies, terrible lies, and I know that I could give in to these lies, and it would be okay. I'd be fine. I'd go on with my life. It would be just great!" But I also knew that the day would come when I'd wake up and it would be way too late, and I didn't want to deal with that.

Elijah: So December 9 was the first time you were able to see that you were a despicable sinner?

Mike: Yeah.

Elijah: It was the first time? I mean, you were willing to say that before. You could say it, but you didn't actually believe it?

Mike: I could say it ... Yeah.

Elijah: And the minute that you're willing to believe it, and you're willing to say "God help me. God save me." God responded. All you had to do was be willing

to admit that you needed salvation, to admit that you actually were worthy of damnation?

Mike: Yes.

Elijah: Let me get this straight. First of all, on December 9 you saw yourself as you really were. Next you saw God as He really is. Then you saw the fact that judgment is coming, and you wanted to avoid that judgment. You wanted God to allow you to pass through the Judgment, and all you did was ask? But that's the first time that you were willing and able to believe all those things?

Mike: Yeah.

Elijah: So the confusion that you had was because Satan was trying to keep you from believing the basic Truth related to those three things?

Mike: Yeah. And I think one of the things that made me see how despicable I really was, was because I finally started listening to that garbage that Satan was shoveling at me so hard. I knew then that I was capable of just going on and doing what Satan wanted. I could just give it up. Do you know what I'm saying?

Elijah: You could just turn away and go another way?

Mike: Turn away and go. That scared me. I had been believing I could never do that. But I suddenly had to admit "I am that person." You know what I mean? I finally saw that the only reason Satan could even say that to me was because he knew it would be attractive to me.

Elijah: So you're telling me Satan actually is a fool? His own lie turned against him because it proved to you that you were the person you didn't want to see yourself as being?

Mike: Yeah.

Elijah: The whole time you've been telling yourself "I've been here this long. That proves I'm a good person. God must have intended for me to be here, so I'm special in God's sight." But in the end, it was,

"Yes, I could turn away, and that proves that I'm not actually the good person that I've always thought I was." Before that, you couldn't see yourself as a sinner consigned to Hell and believe that the only way you could avoid the Judgment was to be saved? You couldn't see that you had to honestly admit who you were? That there was nothing you could do except ask for salvation?

Mike: That's right! That's right! Up until that night, until the level of screaming in my head got to the point that it did, I was still believing that somehow I deserved to be saved because I really wanted to be saved.

Elijah: Oh, there you go! That's a good one!

Mike: See? And all those other things that you said played into it. "I've been here all along. I've been nodding my head, saying, 'yes, this is true' ..."

Elijah: You thought you had value because you had heard and believed all that I've taught?

Mike: "I've heard all The Teaching and not disagreed with any of it." Well, even that's not really true, because ...

Elijah: You didn't disagree with it. You just added things to it.

Mike: There you go! And that Friday night, it was like, man, I was scared because I realized I had finally reached a crisis point, and it could all be over for me because I could just say "No, I don't want this. I really don't want to do this. I really don't want to let God take control."

Elijah: Why? Because it had come to the point where it was no longer merely a depressing thing? Now it had come to almost a mental collapse?

Mike: A psychosis! You talked about wormwood in the last *Update*, in your commentary on "The Shepherd of Hermas," where he talks about mixing wormwood and honey. I was surprised to learn that there was actually a substance that people consumed called wormwood and that it sent them into some

incredibly euphoric state. I learned that is not just figurative language. That is exactly what Satan was holding out to me. No, I shouldn't say it that way. I was already addicted. I was already addicted to that stuff. You know? To the lies? I liked them. I liked the way I felt when I felt good, and didn't like the way I felt when I didn't feel good. That's just like the way I felt taking drugs.

Elijah: So you wanted to go back to feeling good?

Mike: Yeah.

Elijah: That's why a lot of people go to church. They get their weekly "fix" by going to a real, live, rip-snortin' church meetin' and reveling in thoughts of Heaven. They forget they haven't made it to Heaven yet. They listen to the music and all the tripe about how much God loves them. It makes them feel good to believe God would never allow them to go to Hell. So they live from Sunday to Sunday because they know they're going to get a new "fix" that will tell them they're okay with God. You know what I *mean*? There's no day-to-day reality in their spiritual life. What was the reality of Christianity in your life?

Mike: There wasn't any reality. Christianity was just something that I talked about.

Elijah: How has it been different since December 9?

Mike: There are a number of things. The first thing is it's finally quiet in my head. That constant yammering—the hassle and noise that makes it hard to concentrate—is gone.

Elijah: How long had that been there? Had that been there for twenty-one years or whatever?

Mike: No. It reached a constancy beginning in February, when I finally realized that admitting I was a Pretender was not enough.

Elijah: That was the second time you admitted you were a Pretender. But that's when you finally saw you were in deep trouble because the new birth wasn't something you could attain just by admitting you had been a Pretender?

Mike: Yeah. That's when the yammering set in and it stayed in all the time. But it just got worse and worse as time went on. There were various things that happened, various "crisis points" if you will, where I saw another reason why I'm still not a Christian. But none of them were the crisis point that led me into the light, so the screaming just got louder and louder and louder, until December 9 ...

But I need to say that on December 3, one week before, I thought I had finally come to God. I thought I had finally "made the commitment," and there was actually a lull in the yammering for a day. But all along Satan would let me have a day or two here and there where it wasn't constantly beating in my head. That time was different, but I can't really explain the difference. But the quiet and the peace that came into my mind after December 9 is entirely different from any days of respite that Satan gave me prior to that.

Elijah: Why would you say that is?

Mike: Because I can now say with dead certainty: "It's settled. I'm forgiven. God forgave me." He really did! He forgave me! I don't have to go back and re-examine this or that, and beat myself some more, and say "Why? Why? Why is it not done?" It's done!

Elijah: It's settled?

Mike: It's settled.

Elijah: You can say that you know that beyond any shadow of a doubt? Is it because there's something different inside you now that says "Yes! This is true"?

Mike: Yeah.

Elijah: We're *talking about* the internal witness that John Wesley *talks about* in the sermons I included in the last newsletter?

Mike: Yeah. The witness of the Spirit.

Elijah: Now wait a minute! I have said on various occasions that if you have been born again there is no doubt in your mind. There is absolutely no doubt in your mind. I've also said that anybody who says "I don't know if I'm born again" or "I don't know when

I was born again," has never been born again because that event cannot have happened and you not know it. However, you are "class A" evidence that a Pretender can be dead certain they are born again, and because they don't actually know what the experience is, they don't know that they don't know?

Mike: Yeah.

Elijah: Okay. So how do you know this?

Mike: We've been talking about experiences. But to be saved I had to change my mind. I had to repent. I had to give up what I thought. That's what makes the difference. It amazes me that I had to be willing to let go of all the garbage that I thought I knew. The Gospel is real simple, and you've been preaching it with a lot more clarity in the past few months than you ever have. It's just that you've got to recognize who you are, what a sinner you are, that you don't have anything to bring, and you don't know anything about the Truth, about the Light. Those are things that are spiritually discerned. So, if you're a sinner, how can you know anything about those spiritual things? That one went right by me for years. I kept saying, "I must know them, because I know them."

Elijah: So the lie continued to tell you that you knew all these things because you thought you understood them?

Mike: Yeah. The other thing was to be able to recognize Who God is—how good He is.

Elijah: How willing He was to forgive you?

Mike: Yeah! I couldn't believe that! I couldn't accept it, because Satan was telling me it wasn't possible for me to be saved.

Elijah: Well, how could you? You thought everything you did was something sinful. Satan was in there, constantly condemning you. I assume you had to finally learn the difference between condemnation and conviction, and the fact that the Holy Spirit does not condemn, He convicts. He'll merely remind you that you sinned, so that you know you sinned. He's not going to tell you you're stupid and ignorant and

ask you why you can't ever get it right. But Satan's going to say all those things. So you couldn't believe that God would be that good to you?

Mike: No, I really couldn't. I can see how stupid I was now, knowing how true that is. Although the Church teaches nothing but the love of God, they don't understand the Truth.

Elijah: You're telling me that what the Church is teaching about the love of God is in some sense true, that God will willingly forgive you? In spite of the fact that nobody actually believes the Truth, or very few people in the Church actually believe the Truth of the Gospel? They don't know that you first have to come to the point where you can admit to yourself—not to other people, to yourself—that you are worthless. You have to honestly admit it to yourself. And until you admit it to yourself, you can forget it, because the Gospel is all so much gibberish? Is that what you're saying?

Mike: That's right!

Elijah: But once you accept the fact that you have sinned and have no value in God's sight, He will willingly forgive you—freely forgive you—if you honestly repent?

Mike: Freely forgive! But I was still wrapped up in my belief that I somehow had to deserve His forgiveness. I mean, if I was such a mess, and constantly sinning, then how could God forgive me?

Elijah: There you go! That's a good one!

Mike: It was harder for me to accept that near the end, because I was wrapped up in the constant condemnation that Satan was bringing my way. I can see that the more a person reads The Teaching, the more they are exposed to the Truth, if they're still in the flesh, all they become is more aware of their sin, and they experience condemnation. So I began to feel like: "Man, I can never live for God. I've tried and tried. I've done this, I've done that. I've radically changed my behavior. I've stopped doing this, I've stopped doing that. But it doesn't work. It doesn't work. I can't possibly live for God." Then I became afraid of making that

commitment to come to God and repenting. Because I couldn't live for God it became, "After I repent, how can I ever live for God?"

Elijah: First it was, "If I can't do it, then how can I be saved"? Then it was, "If I can't do it now, then how can I do it after I am saved"? That's another example of Satan's stupid arguments! But I've never said Satan is anything but ignorant, or that his lies are logical. He'll tell you any lie that you are stupid enough to believe.

Mike: Anyway, we were talking about how I know the difference between December 9 and all the other times I was "saved." It's because I can look at the Gospel—The Teaching that I have learned—and I know that my life lines up with that now. In the past, I always had a nagging doubt, because I still felt condemned. I could only hope that I would "work it out." All the things that I came to believe, to accept as true, on December 9 fit together perfectly with what I have been taught about recognizing yourself and how sinful we are, recognizing how good God is, and how willing He is to forgive, no matter where we've been or what we've done.

Also there is the recognition that, had I remained on the course I was on, without doubt I would have been destroyed, that there would be no "at the last minute God will save me." I forgot to mention that. That is one of the lies that I believed. It would come in for just fleeting moments in the early years, saying "You know you really stink, but God is going to forgive you in the end. You're not where you're supposed to be, and you may never really be where you're supposed to be, but it'll be okay."

Elijah: In other words, you wanted to believe the lie that says God is not a God of wrath? That He will forgive you even though you haven't honestly repented?

Mike: Yeah.

Elijah: So you've said that you were saved when you finally believed: (1) that you were a sinner, (2) that God would forgive, and (3) that you would suffer in Hell forever if you didn't repent. You've also said you had to see yourself as a sinner, you had to see God as

being willing to forgive, and you had to believe He would freely forgive you if you asked, but that His willingness to forgive does not *mean* He will not send you to Hell. Now you've just said that the lie that says "God is love; He provides unconditional forgiveness" and all of that nonsense you hear in the Church was still in there to the very end?

Mike: In the back of my mind, even after all those years under your Teaching! You know, we're so crooked, we want to believe that everything's okay. All we want to do is just feel good about ourselves so we can go on and do what we want to do. There's that fairy tale, that Disneyland belief, that all stories end happily ever after.

Elijah: Right! Millions are dying of famine in foreign countries but I eat out whenever I like, so life is good. It's a wonderful life down here in the movies! Little do fools who think like that know they are caught up in one mean horror flick with a really nasty ending.

Conclusion

Editor: Mike's struggle to overcome the lies he believed seems too unbelievable to be true. Yet I understand that several of the people who have been with you for more than a decade have finally admitted they were Pretenders and, in coming to the Lord, have had experiences similar to Mike's. After witnessing their difficulties, what would you tell someone who is questioning whether or not they have ever been born again?

Elijah: If they have any doubt whether they have been born again, they haven't. The best thing to do is to willingly admit that. Then expect confusion to set in as Satan tries to turn you back from God. Don't fight the confusion by saying, "I know this" or "I know that." Instead focus on just these three things: (1) your sin, (2) God's willingness to forgive, and (3) the fact that the Judgment is inevitable. Ask Him to convict you and forgive you. Keep asking until you "see." ■

