

GENTLE SHEPHERD MINISTRIES

CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH ~ MAKING DISCIPLES ~ EQUIPPING THE SAINTS FOR MINISTRY

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The Odyssey Part 4 THE STRONGHOLD By Rayola Kelley

For believers there are two great battle fronts that often rage even in the best of times. One is with the tongue. James said the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity that sets on fire hell itself (*James 3:6*). However, the second front is the imagination.

Last month I talked about the "old man" in us who proves to be our greatest enemy. He can swing from emotion to emotion, declare victory from the base pinnacle of intellectual prowess, and jump from one fickle attraction to another, while groping at the ropes of undisciplined affections. At first the "old man" may even appear a bit graceful at his many maneuvers through the jungle of prideful glee, but eventually "he" will experience a great fall that proves it is anything but graceful as he tries to rise up out of the muddy debris of failure and despair.

I am quite aware of this vain exercise that occurs when the "old man" takes center stage to claim his right to reign supreme in his small insipid world of foolishness. I cannot begin to tell you of the many times I had to climb out of the swamp of insanity to once again face the harsh reality that everything the Word of God says about the "fallen man" is absolutely, irrevocably true!

The swamp of insanity not only allows you to see the ridiculousness of the "old man" but to smell the foul odor of death he carries with him. All the different waters of the world will not cleanse him. He is a hopeless wretch, doomed in his miserable state of spiritual ruin.

But, praise the Lord, it was this reality about my hopeless plight that always brought me humbly to the cross of redemption to seek the wonderful intervention of our Lord and

Savior, Jesus Christ. There I would be cleansed by His blood and raised up in identification to a new life that emitted the wondrous fragrance of our Lord's life. And, what a glorious fragrance it must be to the throne of heaven!

The Bible gives us insight into the destructive possibilities of the imagination. We know that unless the mind is transformed, it remains carnal and will prove to be enmity against God. In Noah's day the thoughts of the heart were continually evil. The heights these thoughts reached in their delusion simply revealed the depths that man's mind had fallen away from in relationship to the reality of God. Noah' righteous testimony in the midst of such depravity is what finally ushered in God's judgment upon the whole world. We are told in *Matthew 24:37-39* that the environment in the end of the last days will be the same as it was in the days of Noah. The Apostle Paul said of that day that people would ever be learning but not really coming to the real knowledge of Jesus (*Genesis 6:5; Romans 8:5-7; 2 Timothy 3:7; 2 Peter 2:5*).

In *2 Corinthians 10:2-5*, we are told that the spiritual strongholds are in the mind. These strongholds are imaginations that exalt themselves against the real knowledge of God. In *Ezekiel 8:12-13*, it talks about idolatry taking place in the imagery of the mind. In *Ezekiel 14:3-4*, we are told that man can have idols in his heart. It is for this reason that I refer to idols in the heart as idols in secret chambers and for the idols of the imagination, I refer to them as idols in high places.

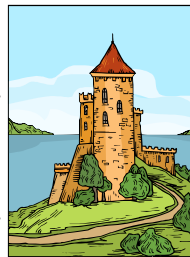
The truth is that we often create in our imagination, a god to our own liking or preference. Even though we declare that the god we have exalted

is the God of the Bible, it is not so. The reality is that the god of imagination is a god we can understand and control, but when life hits us with the unexpected, the god of imagination proves lifeless and powerless. It is at this point that we can become angry and disillusioned with our god, but we transfer it onto the God of the Bible.

Clearly, to overcome the "old man" in us we must come to terms with the ways of the carnal mind. Before I could face the depth of depravity the "old man" can quickly descend to, I had to recognize the type of tool that could dig a deep hole in seconds. In fact, for me I cannot begin to tell you how many grand canyons I have dug over the years with this tool. After all, it seemed so harmless. The size of this tool seems small and powerless. However, its ability to dig and enlarge any pit, while it ascends the heights of ridiculousness is indescribable. And, what is this insignificant tool? It is the imagination.

Imagination begins with one little thought. But, this little spade of a thought opens the door to the shovel of possibilities which employs the backhoe of speculation. The backhoe of speculation begins to dig the hole of foolishness. As the backhoe of speculation begins to descend into the black hole of ridiculousness, it must then implore the giant crane of arrogance to fill the big gravel trucks of nonsense with the endless debris of perverse conclusions. The truck of perverse conclusions, creates a rut of insanity because there is no apparent route out of the abyss of mental despair that has now been generated by the endless activity of the mind.

No doubt, some of you probably relate to the above scenario. Perhaps, you may even have a better description of it than I do. However, this is a fair explanation of how the imagination works. It is for this reason that we are instructed to take every thought captive, not our imagination, and bring each one into obedience to Christ (*2 Corinthians 10:5*). It is obvious that the imagination is activated by our thought process.



Through the years many of my battles have been fought on the frontline of my imagination. It never took much for my imagination to start digging a pit of mental despair, while my high opinions about my conclusions would begin to swing from the heights of absurdity. As I became increasingly aware of the process by which my imagination would eventually slide downward, gaining a frightening momentum, I would begin to mark the point where it would take off on a tangent flight that had no real thrust behind it. Then I would try to brace myself as I knew I would fall into an emotional torrent that could be related to taking a miserable roller coaster ride that would crash in a pit of despair.

It is for this reason that I want to address the culprit that causes so many people to operate in a despairing reality rather than in light of the hope of heaven. Instead of experiencing a roller coaster ride that leads to utter hopelessness, we as believers, can learn to grab the eternal Rock of Heaven, knowing the Lord will work all matters out according to His perfect plan.

In order to learn how to grab the Rock of heaven when we are on an emotional roller coaster ride is not as hard as one would think, but it can prove to be somewhat daring. It is daring because we must look for the exits that have been provided for us. When the momentum is great, it can prove to be a bit disconcerting to find the exit.

Before we consider the exits God provides, let us look at the places our imagination takes us. The first place it will usually take us is to the heights of infallibility. So many times we cannot see how we are wrong about our conclusions. It seems that at such heights of confidence, our thoughts are clear and certain. We have looked from every angle and cannot conceive that we do not have the right take on a matter. At that point, we have such assurance in our understanding. However, even from such heights, we can only know in part and our thoughts will never reach the heights of God for His thoughts are higher. It is for this reason that we are told not to lean on our own understanding. I

have learned through the years that the exit when it comes to this particular ride is to stop my thought process and seek God's perspective (*Proverbs 3:5; Isaiah 55:8-9; Romans 12:3; 1 Corinthians 10:12; 13:9*).

The next place our imagination can take us is to the place of possibilities. In our false state of infallibility we can imagine that there is no end to what is possible. However, from such heights we cannot see the detailed topography of the terrain below. There are canyons of temptations, pits of challenges, and ravines of confusion. Obviously, when we encounter these different types of terrain, we cannot fly over them; rather, we must walk through or around each area. It is for this reason that many individuals can settle on the plateaus of complacency, never really advancing upward to obtain what is excellent or descending to the valley where they are forced to choose the route they must tread. The prophet Joel best describes this valley, "*Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision: for the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision*" (*Joel 3:14*).

I have learned that when I hit this point of the place of possibilities, that I must not only stop to get my bearings, but I must repent. It is at this point that the conclusions of the imagination can become quite idolatrous. Repentance of idolatry requires me to turn around from pursuing or serving false gods and seek the light of the true God of heaven and earth.

What normally follows the place of possibilities is that of speculation. Possibilities generally represent a pinnacle of unrealistic dreams or expectations. However, such possibilities will often elude us and we will find ourselves sliding down the slippery trail of speculations. Speculation begins when a person hits confusion and uncertainty about a situation. At this point many try to fill in the blanks with indifferent opinions, wishful platitudes, and past experiences. It is at this place that imagination can run rampant because there is nothing to really compare our conclusions to other than the Word of God. It is from this premise that many usually crash land in the pit of fear.

Fear brings us to the final place of our mental journey. Fear represents the ultimate depth that all vain imagina-

tions will lead us. As you consider how vain imagination works, you realize that it eventually comprises a slide, and once the descent into the pit of fear begins, it can be quite harrowing. It is amazing how we can be swinging in the heights of great expectation or minding our own business on the plateau of normalcy one minute, only to be brought down into the very pit of fear the next minute. This reaction is because we have come face-to-face with unknown territory. As doubt reaches up to clutch us, we find ourselves being pulled down as our feet begin to slip on the wet rocks of speculation about the present situation. After all, we want to be sure about a matter, but when we reach the slippery rocks of assumption, we cannot be sure of anything except that fear is ready to swallow us in a black pit of hopelessness.

In the pit of fear, probabilities of defeat and destruction can take center stage. In the pit, we cannot see any hope on the horizon; therefore, it all looks bleak. It is at this point we come face-to-face with the strongholds of imagination that can be erected in our mind. As in the Promised Land, vain imaginations at this place represent the formidable giants that are standing in the way of the life that God promised us.

We have a choice. We can stand in fear of the giants or in awe of God. We can choose to listen to the hopeless claims of our imagination or put our focus on the One who delivers. We can choose to deny fear any real platform or we can give way to its idolatrous, enslaving lies. We can focus on the hopelessness of fear or put our mind on the Lord and come to a place of peace and rest in Him (*Isaiah 26:3*).

Admittedly, it is not easy to put one's mind on Christ after the slippery descent takes place into the pit of fear, but we must realize that as long as our nose is up against the wall of fear it will appear as an infallible giant. It is for this reason, I tell people to quit pushing against fear to try to conquer it; instead, back up. Once you back up, you can look upward to put your focus on the Lord, for the battle is really His. Once you do, grace will be able to flow downward and give you that measure of faith to simply stand in confidence

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WHEN DID GOD CHANGE?

By Jeannette Haley

If the cowardly lion from the classic Wizard of Oz tale could have only put his paws on a keyboard and growled his grievances through email, there would have been no reason for him to hit the yellow brick road in search of courage. People who are too cowardly to express their angst, frustration, anger and outright animosity in person seem to have no problem doing so while taking cover behind their computer, or latest communication gadget.

Such was the case last year when I forwarded an email to a few Christians, including one woman I've known since we were both in the second grade. The content of the email was basically a notice to believers to boycott a certain large department store because of its blatant in-your-face ads pandering to homosexuals, complete with disgusting pictures showing their "alternative" lifestyle that included children.

While I had a feeling that this particular woman (who had hunted for, and found just the "type" of preacher and church that suited her ideas and lifestyle) might not agree, I was surprised at her vehement reaction. She let me know in no uncertain terms that she was 100% an admirer and fan of a certain celebrity lesbian. Rather than argue with her, I merely asked her this question: "When did God change?" Her profound response was, "Huh?"

That got me to thinking ever since about the muddy streams of satanic propaganda and lies that are converging into the raging end times tsunami of the one-world religion. Only those born again believers who are secure upon the Rock of Jesus Christ, know their God, and *know that He and His Word never changes, and that truth is truth* will be spared from being swept away to death and destruction by the subtle undertow. This is a crucial point where the narrow way becomes seemingly even more narrow and steep while the broad way veers off into a wider "easy street."

After all, it's so much easier, and a whole lot more fun to go with the popular flow, especially when so many big and impressive churches

and admired "Christian" leaders are promoting "new revelations," mystical experiences, and ear-tickling teachings that appeal to one's senses, imagination, intellect, emotions and pride. Yet, in *Colossians 2:2, 3* we are told where all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge that people seek after are found, and that is in God the Father and in Christ. Then the writer warns, "*And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words...As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving. Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ*" verses 4, 6-8.

In order to be rooted and built up in Christ, and established in the faith every believer needs to be properly disciplined in the Word of God. Tragically, the majority of Christians today have been left to define Christianity on their own terms, according to their own desires, fantasies, imaginations, feelings, and experiences, including cultural, and family influences. The end result is a multitude of people possessing a hodge-podge of "pick and choose" unscriptural beliefs who, nevertheless, insist on being under the Christian banner. The truth is, such people cannot give an account of the hope that is within them, nor can they give a testimony of how or when they became saved and born again. You will never hear them talk about the cross, sin, eternal separation from God, hell, repentance or the importance of winning the lost, and if they do mention Jesus, it is usually in the context of sentimentality as voiced by a religious spirit. What you will hear them talk about is their church, their pastor, their worship, their fastings, their "ministry of intercession," their spiritual warfare, their position in the "five-fold ministry," their prophecies, their contemplative prayer and meditation (which is occultic), their lengthy dreams, visions, and goal of a great, world-wide revival.

Has God changed? Well, if we are to believe all the modern Bible translations, paraphrased "versions" and published works that make a mockery out of God's word such as Peterson's "The

Message," then of course we can glibly say that God has changed. If you change His Word, then you change the Author and Spirit behind that word. People are growing bolder in their blatant tampering with the Word of God by adding to it, and taking away from it which is strictly condemned in Scripture. Jesus said that heaven and earth would pass away, but His Word would never pass away. Woe to the man or woman who takes it upon him or herself to add to or take away from God's Word! Here is one warning: "*And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book*" *Revelation 22:19*. We read in *Proverbs 30:5, 6* "*Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him. Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar.*"

Has God changed? If we are to believe that sin, and the deviant and ungodly beliefs that God has condemned from the beginning of time are now acceptable to Him in any measure, then it is only reasonable to conclude that God has changed. Following this line of thought to its logical conclusion would make Him a liar, for He has declared, "*I am the LORD, I change not*" *Malachi 3:6a*. We read in *Hebrews 1:10-12*, "*And, Thou Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands: They shall perish; but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; And as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail.*"

If Christians today were asked, "When did God change?" in all probability most would respond in the same manner as my friend, while not a few would affirm that it is impossible for God to change. However, if we were somehow given the ability to observe the lifestyles and attitudes of Christians across the land, we would have to conclude that they do indeed believe God has changed. In the minds of most people today (both within and without the Church) the great I AM of the Old Testament is

either irrelevant, or He has “progressed” along with our world and culture.

Therefore, let's stop right here and pretend. Pretend that God has changed, and progressed along with modern man. This means that God is not who He says He is; that is, immutable. Of course, this not only makes God a liar, but it renders the Bible outdated, and irrelevant to our lives. If God has changed, then none of the written Word is revealed in the Living Word, or Christ. In fact, the Bible cannot be believed or trusted because if God changes, then His Word changes too. Thus, no one can depend on a single bit of revelation, exhortation, explanation, warning, prophecy or promises. There is no explanation or reason for the origin or purpose of life, no answers as to why people die and all creation suffers, no promise of salvation and eternal life, and no hope. If God has changed, and “progressed” along with our wonderful, liberal, enlightened culture, then God is no longer holy, pure, undefiled, majestic, glorious and all powerful. If God has changed, He now winks at what His Word condemns. He has become like us—politically correct and tolerant. Thus, perversion, fornication, adultery, evil imaginations, lewdness, pornography, unnatural and inordinate affection, homosexuality, pedophilia, abortion, cruelty, murder, uncleanness, debauchery, rebellion, heresy, drunkenness, partying, cursing, violence, vile-ness, lust, greed, and covetousness to name a few of the works of the flesh, are really no big deal.

On the spiritual side of things, if God has changed, there is no standard of righteousness, so He no longer cares when people damn their souls to eternal hell by worshipping anything they want. They can kick back and enjoy Harry Potter, and the rest of the devilish and filthy garbage Hollywood produces, along with all the dirt they can dig up on the Internet. They can delve into witchcraft, Satanism, idolatry, shamanism, eastern religions, New Age mysticism, transcendental meditation, and mind-science religions endlessly. In fact, there is no way to calculate how many different beliefs make up heathenism, but the truth is, there is only ONE “way, truth, and life” and that is through Jesus Christ who said, “*I am*

the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” Of course, if God has indeed changed and progressed, then this isn't a true statement, and those who have chosen some “other way” can happily ignore the claims of Jesus. On the other hand, if God is still God, and if His Word is still the truth, then those who refuse to confess with their mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in their heart that God has raised him from the dead are eternally damned. Period. (See *Romans 10:9-13*.)

I don't know about you, but this little “pretend” adventure, limited and sketchy as it is, has caused me to literally tremble. Can you think of anything more terrifying than the thought that God and His Word are not unchanging, nor stable, nor dependable, nor true? Where would that leave us? The entire universe would vanish if this were so, for it is held together by “the word of His power.” (*Hebrews 1:3*.) The problem is, we take everything for granted, including God. Like spoiled children, we assume that because God loves us, we can ignore who He is and what He says, and that He will always be there for us, smiling and nodding like a patronizing grandfather, regardless of what we believe, think or do.

A. W. Tozer wrote about what he called “This little cheap God,” and I quote: “If God had goodness, but there was one spot in God that wasn't good, then He wouldn't be our God and Father. If God had love but didn't have all the love, just ninety-nine and nine-tenths percent of the love—or even a higher percentage—God still wouldn't be God. God, to be God, must be infinite in all that He is. He must have no bound and no limit, no stopping place, no point beyond which He can't go. When you think of God or anything about God you'll have to think infinitely about God. You may have a charley horse in your head for two weeks after trying to follow this, but it's a mighty good cure for this little cheap god we have today. This little cheap god we've made up is one you can pal around with—‘the Man upstairs,’ the fellow who helps you win baseball games. That god isn't the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He isn't the God who laid the foundations of the heaven and the earth;

he's some other god.”

The question is, who is God to you? Is He the Most High God, Creator of heaven and earth, the Almighty, the Lord, the King and the Judge of the whole earth? Is He your personal Lord and Savior? Or, is your god one that you have fashioned for yourself out of your own needs, impulses, ideas and imagination—a god of false light, false hope and false peace—a god that overlooks your sinful, selfish and self-satisfying life? If your god is the latter, your bloodless god is unable to save you. Jesus is the only sacrifice for the sins of the world that God can accept because only Jesus fulfilled the requirements of God's law concerning punishment for sin. “*Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us*” *Hebrews 9:12*.

There are many lights we can walk according to—there is our own light, or understanding based on pride and self-sufficiency. There is the mesmerizing false light of the god of this world; that is, Satan. But, the light for the true Christian is Christ. “*But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin*” *1 John 1:7*. Are you walking in the light? †††

IN WHICH GROUP ARE YOU? By Donald G. Barnhouse

“In the world today men seek not the will of Satan but their own will. They have become the ‘children of wrath’ (Ephesians 2:3). Some few became children of the devil (John 8:44). An infinite company became ‘children of God’ (Galatians 3:26). The children of wrath and the children of the devil unite as the ‘world’ to oppose the course of the believers (John 15:18, 19)...Christ stated...that no man could ever believe in the Christ of the gospels if he did not believe in the writings of Moses, including...Genesis (John 5:46, 47). The reason the Jews rejected Christ was because they had rejected Moses; it is impossible for any man to believe fully in the New Testament gospels if he has rejected the Pentateuch....Satan brings his every force to bear against...the Bible.”

that He will raise you out of the pit and give you His heavenly perspective.

This brings me to another aspect of imagination. It is the stigma of standards. So many times Christians feel guilty about crashing into the pit of fear. The guilt comes from not living up to personal or religious standards. Individuals who struggle with this stigma often perceive that they should be above falling into any pit of despair. They do not realize that religious standards are erected by our imagination without any real consideration of the human side of a person. The Lord understands our frame and how life challenges its very resolve. The reality is life sometimes comes like a locomotive through the midst of our terrain. Since there are no tracks for the train to properly maneuver through the terrain, it often tears up the turf, leaving chaos behind.

It is in such times (when our life is out of control) that we must trust that God is still in control. He does understand and even though the countryside is torn up by uncertainty, He desires to walk us through the debris. However, it takes everything in us to step over our imagination, cast all our concerns on Him, and take His hand.

I have found myself many times in the pit of fear facing the real strongholds of my life. You would think that I would avoid the pit, but as my imagination takes me captive and I find myself riding on the roller coaster, quickly plunging downward. Each time I have found myself in this unpleasant place, I have learned just how faithful God is to meet me in my plight. He has never left me in despair, nor has He forsaken me in the time of hopelessness.

As Christians, we can take comfort in our different pits, knowing that the Lord’s faithfulness is our hope, our place of assurance, and our legacy.



QUOTABLE

“Reputation is what men think we are. Character is what God knows we are. Character impacts attitudes and deeds.” —Thomas Paine
“When we become too glib in prayer we are most surely talking to ourselves.” — A. W. Tozer

RAYOLA’S Q & A CORNER

HOW DOES LOVE COVER A “MULTITUDE OF SINS?”

Q: *What does Peter mean when he says love covers a multitude of sins in 1 Peter 4:8? Does it mean we are to ignore what people do to us? Admittedly, I have felt confusion and condemnation because I do not always feel Christian or act Christian against those who offend me. Could you put it in perspective?*

A: It is important to understand our responsibility towards others when it comes to matters of personal offence. One of the problems is that Christianity is presented in an unrealistic light. The reason that this unrealistic light is present is because much of the present presentation does not allow for our human side. In our humanity we struggle with feelings and emotions because of how others treat us. However, we must discern different aspects about the treatment of these individuals.

The first thing we must discern is if the person is personally attacking our person. Jesus asked the Father to forgive those who put Him on the cross because they had no idea of what they were doing (*Luke 23:34*). When people personally offend us, we must discern if they are even aware of what they have done. More often than not personal offence is a matter of personal pride that has been offended and not an actual affront against our person. Most of the offences I have suffered in the past have occurred because of my moodiness at the time. I was touchy; therefore, I was easily offended by someone who had no idea I was even affected by their words or actions.

The second thing we must discern is if the offence is an actual trespass against God. As believers, we are called to adhere to a moral code of excellence when it comes to our conduct. Love will never ignore or cover a trespass where a believer is concerned for it will never rejoice in iniquity. Such sin separates the person in his or her relationship with God. These types of sins involve immoral or dishonorable actions such as fornication, malicious gossip and lying, and sowing discord among the brethren. The Bible is clear

that if a trespass is committed, our main responsibility is not to become personally offended but to ensure that the person is once again restored into a relationship with the Lord. We must personally go to that person in love and confront him or her about his or her action with the intent of restoration. If the person fails to repent, then we are to go to those who are in some type of spiritual leadership or influence where the offender is concerned (*Matthew 18:15-17; 1 Corinthians 5*).

Church leadership can go two ways: leaders can Scripturally confront the trespass by sending in a second witness to the matter in order to deal with, reason, and ensure a matter is Scriptural. If the culprit still refuses to repent, the leadership must bring it before believers who are involved with the person and warn them to separate from such an individual and no longer have any association until there is true repentance. If the leadership chooses to ignore the matter, then you must withdraw from any real fellowship with the person until the matter has been properly resolved.

I believe the Scripture in 1 Peter has to do with mainly personal offence that occurs because of pride. As Christians, we need to neglect our pride, step over the offence, and allow godly love to dictate to us as to our attitude and actions in all matters. In most cases, one will discover that the offence did not amount to anything but a weak moment that allowed pettiness or misunderstanding to raise its head and define the incident. We need to learn how to let people be human whether they are a bit abrasive or forceful, while keeping our own attitudes, standards, and ideas in check. We must choose the way of love over the way of personal offence.

I do hope this puts it in perspective. It is true that we must not ignore that which attacks our person, character, or testimony, but we need to keep touchy feelings and petty, prideful offences in perspective. However, the Bible is clear about the procedure one must take if a trespass has occurred to keep a matter from becoming a point of speculation, gossip, and division. ✠✠✠

REAL DISCIPLES OR NOT? (From Andrew Strom)

"Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the Cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.

"Costly grace is the treasure hidden in the field; for the sake of it a man will gladly go and sell all that he has. It is the pearl of great price to buy which the merchant will sell all his goods. It is the kindly rule of Christ, for whose sake a man will pluck out the eye which causes him to stumble, it is the call of Jesus Christ at which the disciple leaves his nets and follows him." - Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*—(Hitler had Bonhoeffer shot because he chose to bow to Christ rather than to the Gestapo.)

"Matthew 28:19 reads 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...' R.S.V., and most versions. The Greek reads, 'To become a pupil.' 'Enroll as a scholar.' Christ did not say to make 'converts,' but rather to 'make disciples.' 'Followers.' How very imperative it is to hold fast the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ!

"The 'gospel' of our Lord Jesus Christ is not the gospel that is being preached in most pulpits today! Today's gospel is 'another gospel,' it is not the gospel of the Scriptures! Generally speaking, the church that provides the best and the most entertainment is the church that garners the greatest number of attendants.

"Much of today's gospel is a false gospel, built on false premises, built on false teaching! Should any sincere Christian question this statement, let this individual read Matthew chapter 7:13-28 and verse 29 which says that those who heard Christ's teachings were astonished. Can you imagine the astonishment of people today also, if His message were being preached and taught in our pulpits!" - Unknown

And they of the church
And they of the world;
Walk hand and heart,
And only God who knoweth all
Can tell the two apart.

Hear what Dr. W. W. Tozer has to say on this matter, "Any objections to the carrying on of our present golden-calf Christianity is met with the triumphant reply, 'But we are winning them.' And winning them to what? To true discipleship? To cross carrying? To self-denial? To separation from the world? To crucifixion of the flesh? To holy living? To nobility of character? To hard self-discipline? To love for God? To total commitment to Christ? Of course the answer to all these questions is 'no'." John Fletcher said, "More is said from our pulpits in favor of sin than against it."

"No longer is the thundering message of the prophet of God heralded from the sacred pulpit, warning against the wrath of a holy and just God against sin." - Wesley Duewel

TRIALS & CONSOLATIONS By Charles Haddon Spurgeon

*"For as the sufferings of Christ
abound in us, so our consolation
also aboundeth by Christ."
2 Corinthians 1:5*

There is a blessed proportion. The Ruler of Providence bears a pair of scales — in this side He puts His people's trials, and in that He puts their consolations. When the scale of trial is nearly empty, you will always find the scale of consolation in nearly the same condition; and when the scale of trials is full, you will find the scale of consolation just as heavy. When the black clouds gather most, the light is the more brightly revealed to us. When the night lowers and the tempest is coming on, the Heavenly Captain is always closest to His crew. It is a blessed thing, that when we are most cast down, then it is that we are most lifted up by the consolations of the Spirit. One reason is, because trials make more room for consolation. Great hearts can only be made by great troubles. The spade of trouble digs the reservoir of comfort deeper, and makes more room for consolation. God comes into our heart — He finds it full — He begins to break our comforts and to make it empty; then there is more room for grace. The humbler a man lies, the more comfort he will always have, because he will be more fitted to re-

ceive it. Another reason why we are often most happy in our troubles, is this — then we have the closest dealings with God. When the barn is full, man can live without God: when the purse is bursting with gold, we try to do without so much prayer. But once take our gourds away, and we want our God; once cleanse the idols out of the house, then we are compelled to honour Jehovah. "Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O Lord. "There is no cry so good as that which comes from the bottom of the mountains; no prayer half so hearty as that which comes up from the depths of the soul, through deep trials and afflictions. Hence they bring us to God, and we are happier; for nearness to God is happiness. Come, troubled believer, fret not over your heavy troubles, for they are the heralds of weighty mercies. †

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM UNDER ATTACK IN AMERICA

The most recent edition of the 140-page [Survey of Religious Hostility in America](http://downloads.frc.org/EF/EF12H29.pdf), (<http://downloads.frc.org/EF/EF12H29.pdf>) presents over 600 incidents of religious attacks and hostility in the United States including, but by no means limited to these events:

- A federal judge threatened "incarceration" to a high school valedictorian unless she removed references to Jesus from her graduation speech.
- A public school official physically lifted an elementary school student from his seat and reprimanded him in front of his classmates for praying over his lunch.
- The U.S. Department of Justice argued before the Supreme Court that the federal government can tell churches and synagogues which pastors and rabbis it can hire and fire. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs banned the mention of God from veterans' funerals, overriding the wishes of the deceased's families.

*"He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him."
—John 14:21*