

The Encourager is Encouraged

By Gary Henry

"For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift, so that you may be established — that is, that I may be encouraged together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me" (Romans 1:11,12).

The process of encouragement is rarely a one-way street. Almost without exception, the encourager is encouraged in the very act of trying to encourage someone else. And the reverse is also true. By neglecting to encourage others, we deprive ourselves of much-needed encouragement that we might otherwise receive.

Paul's relationship with the Christians in Rome is interesting. He expected, when he got to Rome, to encourage their faith, but he also expected to be encouraged by them as well. Great apostle though he was, he needed the mutual strengthening that would come from their association. He needed their strength hardly any less than they needed his. But his encouragement would come from helping them — not by saying, "What can you do for me?"

Perhaps the mutual nature of encouragement is one reason that so many of us spend so much time in the dark valleys of discouragement. We spend so little time trying to encourage anyone else, it's little surprise that we find ourselves so down-

hearted. Epidemics of discouragement should be expected in societies that are as self-centered as ours. One of the most disheartening things in the world is to be focused on whether others are lifting us up and brightening our spirits as they "ought" to be doing.

But even when we're encouraging others, we won't be encouraged if we don't LISTEN to ourselves. When we're figuring out what the other person needs to hear, we usually discover things that WE need to hear, but those lessons will be lost on us if we don't listen to our own instruction. And really, why should our friends take our advice if we're not willing to take it ourselves? "Physician," our friends might say, "heal yourself!" (Luke 4:23).

But teaching — whether by instruction, exhortation, or encouragement — can be a wonderfully beneficial exercise. It can help both parties, the giver no less than the recipient. So look for somebody to encourage. Find out what truth THEY need to hear, and then listen to that truth YOURSELF. You'll be encouraged.

"We cannot hold a torch to light another's path without brightening our own" (Ben Sweetland).



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Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:16)

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The People of God - Their Attitudes Towards the Social Order

By Ed Harrell

Throughout history, in relating themselves to the world, the two options which Christians have most often pursued were to vigorously strive to control the world or to disdainfully withdraw from it. Some have dreamed that they would make their society "Christian," necessarily defined in cultural and nationalistic terms, and have passed laws, mounted reforms, and, ironically, fought wars, in the name of Christ. At the other end of the spectrum have been the ascetics who, seeing the folly of coercing sinners into behaving like saints, have denounced the sinful world and withdrawn into isolation — hermits, monks, Amish, and the like.

However much these two models seem consistent to us, they are not what Jesus had in mind. "I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth. As thou hast sent me into the world, even so I have also sent them into the world." (John 17:14-18.) There is the dilemma — in it but not of it. The Christian does not belong here, even as Jesus did not belong here, but he has a work to do in the midst of the persistent filth and degradation. We have work to do. But that work is not the redemption

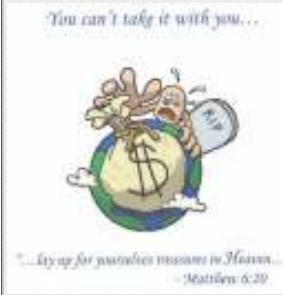
of the world — a world which is beyond redemption and can only hate those who rise above sin. The work is the eternal salvation of the honest and good souls.

Perhaps when compared with the sacred literature of other religions, the most remarkable feature of the New Testament, is its almost total disregard of the society of its day. This of course, is quite a contrast to the Old Testament where God's kingdom, for prophetic reasons, was civil as well as religious. But one could read the New Testament through and go away knowing almost nothing of the society in which it was written. How was the government structured? What were the laws of inheritance, labor, family relations, foreign relations? Clearly, Jesus did not much care. It is true that the New Testament occasionally recognizes the fact that the powerful oppress the weak (James 2:6-7), but it offers no general solutions. Just a certain note of resignation. No revolutions were launched. It is just as if these things really did not matter. And that is exactly the case.

Spiritual work or social reform?

Jesus explained to Pilate that his kingdom was not of this world, thus his servants would not fight. (John 18:36) His kingdom was spiritual and his followers would be occupied with spiritual work. Jesus had come to seek and save the lost. He never envisioned that society would become just — in fact, he clearly stated that most peo-

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Thoughts to Ponder

Aim at heaven and you get earth thrown in. Aim at earth and you get neither.

Do You Have a Bible Question?
Call (334) 734-2133 or
E-mail:
LarryRouse@aubeacon.com



SCHEDULE OF SERVICES Sunday

Bible Class9:30 AM
Worship10:20 AM
Evening Worship 6:00 PM

Wednesday

Bible Classes.....7:00 PM

Ask about our home Bible Study Groups!

Larry Rouse
Evangelist and Editor

Check Us Out On the Internet: www.aubeacon.com

Classes This Week

Sun. 5:15 PM Kid's Class at Bld.	Sat. 6-8 PM 1-6 Grade Class at Davis'	Sat. 6:30-8:30 PM 7-12 Grade Class at Rouse's
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Sick

Fran Snyder (Mother of Carla Humphrey)	Lori Holloway	Chick Wade	Sandlyn Fultz (Davis Fultz's Sister)
Gloria Detmer and Carol Dickerson (Toni Herd's Sisters)	Carrie Chavers (Friend of Sharon Bailey)	Bill Rhodes and James Hall (Toni Herd's Uncles)	Philip Locke (Jeremiah Johnson's Uncle)
Josie Keith (Friend of Heath Fowler)	Grandparents of Mary Ann Roberts	Easton Alexander (Phillip Box's cousin's baby)	Jerry Sandlin (Megan Lee's Grandfather)
Richard Call Seth Humphrey's Uncle	Quinton Addison (April Jerkins Grandfather)	Erlene Davis (Walker Davis' mother)	Mary Smith (Nathan Smith's Grandmother)
Gerald White (Christopher, Anna and Wesley's Father)	Dave Brown (Friend of the Lanier's)	Dale Herd (William Herd's brother)	Larry Alexander (Friend of Phillip Box)
Marty and Aubrey Meeks, Russell Dickerson (Toni Herd's Nephews)	Frank Johnson (Debbi Coleman's Uncle)	Ann Robinson (Sharon Bailey's Mom)	Mike Reed (Friend of Long's)

August Birthdays

- 2 - Emma Miller
- 5 - Andrew Cagle
- 7 - Anna Leigh Peek
- 7 - David Golden
- 7 - Erin Dallas
- 9 - Elliot Weldon
- 10 - Sarah Tam
- 11 - Walker Davis
- 12 - Jon Coleman
- 18 - Lisa Armstrong
- 20 - Caleb Law
- 22 - David Crawford
- 27 - Stephen Ambrose
- 27 - Chip Freeman
- 28 - Larry Rouse
- 28 - Cole Johnson
- 29 - Blake Edwards

News and Notes

- ☑ Let us remember Matthew Johnson, David Golden and Tim Morton in our prayers as they are deployed overseas.
- ☑ Make note of new addresses: Bradley Seymore + Davis Fultz, 3050 Lee Rd 56 (36832)
- ☑ Our meeting with Dee Bowman will be Aug 21-24. Flyers are in the foyer.
- ☑ We welcome all of returning and new college students!
- ☑ We welcome all of our visitors! Please fill out a visitor's card if you have not already done so.
- ☑ Signup lists are in the back of the foyer for all ladies classes. This will determine the number of books that will be ordered.
- ☑ Signup lists to host or teach the 1-6 and 7-12 grade classes are on bulletin board.
- ☑ CD's of all sermons will be available immediately after services.

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ple would reject the path of righteousness which he taught. Individual regeneration makes people better, but the reformer who imagines that the world will become a moral utopia craves a millennium which the scriptures do not promise. Our escape from evil will come only with our escape from this wicked world.

One of the persistent marks of apostate religion is a shift in emphasis from the spiritual to the work of social reform. This change of emphasis marks a people whose spiritual purpose has become blunted. Salvation, forgiveness, and heaven become inadequate ends, and "other-worldly" religion is supplanted by "this-worldly" ethical and moral reform. When a man comes to spend most of his time worrying about the predicament of man in this world, he has lost view of the consummate importance of the next world. Physical suffering or death are of little consequence when compared with eternal matters. In the honor roll of those who died in faith (Hebrews, chapter eleven), suffering and injustice appear as irrelevant tragedies in this transient life, overshadowed by the truly significant triumph of those who live by faith to the saving of their souls.

So, it is easy to get things out of perspective. Men infatuated with this world come to center their religion on the problems of this world rather than the salvation of souls. Modern liberal Protestantism is a religion that has lost its spiritual zest and has become little more than soft-headed reformism. But conservatives can also become "this-worldly" in their religion, in the manner of Billy James Hargis and Carl McIntyre. The solution that one has to the world's problems is not so much the point as the truth that those who seek to save the nations are not likely to be much interested in saving people. Jesus and his disciples ignored Rome to seek and save those who were lost.

Growing schism in Churches of Christ

The changes in Churches of Christ in the years after World War II reflect a growing schism along these lines. The division over the use of the churches' funds to support orphan homes, other benevolent institutions, and for various social and recreational purposes, while raising important scriptural issues, clearly reflected a shifting balance in the minds of many about the relative importance of this world and the next. While the New Testament teaches that all Christians will react humanely to the world around them (**Gal. 6:10**), and the local churches felt a common responsibility for the lives of other saints, one soon reaches the end of the New Testament's social instructions. The extension of the church's role to that of

a generous benevolent society and a service institution to provide recreational and social fellowship is both unscriptural and a clear perversion of the otherworldly emphasis one finds in the New Testament. The apostolic churches were a spiritual fellowship for the purpose of evangelization, edification, and worship. When one changes that scheme he almost surely has come to underestimate the importance of spiritual things, and to think more highly than he ought to of the importance of this world.

In short what ultimately becomes the social gospel in liberal churches — the message that Jesus came to bring social justice to this world — begins slowly and with good intentions. Innocent, and even scriptural, as the support of benevolent institutions seemed to many well-intentioned members of Churches of Christ, the pattern of thinking that emphasizes the solution of social ills starts one down a long road that has no end. If Christianity calls us to the solution of the world's social problems, as millions in the past have conceived it to do, one must push on beyond the poor and orphaned to cleanse the world of every social evil. And it is a mission that Jesus failed to attend to, as did Paul and all the other divinely guided men in apostolic days. And it is a mission which inevitably leads us away from the work which the New Testament calls us to do — preaching the gospel to a lost world.

Keep things in perspective!

All of this does not mean that a Christian is socially caloused, nor does it mean that one is forbidden to participate in the political order in which he lives. Christians live lives of compassion, and are ready to help those in need always as they have ability and opportunity. A Christian has a right to exercise any civil exercise that the government grants to him which does not cause him to violate the principles of Christian conduct. One may pay taxes (**Matt. 22:17-21**), appeal to the courts (Acts 25:8-12), and, I believe, hold a civil office (**Phil. 4:22; Acts 19:12**) without undermining his Christian commitment. And certainly has a right, and an obligation, to try to make the society in which he lives as peaceful and hospitable as possible, using the means that the government grants to him as a citizen.

The point is: keep it in perspective. A runaway sentimentality and distortion of New Testament

social teachings has led many to involve local churches in unscriptural ends ranging from the

building of orphan homes to the sponsoring of black guerrillas in Rhodesia. And a runaway zeal for a politically moral society has led some to forget how little difference the shape of this world makes.



Different by Design

By Dee Bowman

Peter, inspired by the Spirit, tells us that Christians are "a holy nation, a peculiar people, that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (**1 Pet. 2:9**). When I was just a little fellow, I remember hearing sermons about Christians being "peculiar" people, and how they were to be different from other folks around—even if it meant being odd or irregular. I have since learned that the word peculiar means more than being different or odd — though we may seem to be that. This peculiarity has to do with our being "a people for God's own possession." In fact, our word peculiar has its source in Latin and is a close translation of the Greek word. The Latin word is peculium and means "private property." Even before that it meant a person's "personal cattle."

However, there is still a connotation in the word that expresses a setting apart, being different or distinctive. The Christian is a saint and the word "saint" means "called out", or separated, and speaks to that same peculiarity or separation, as well. Even the Greek word translated "church," in the New Testament, ekklesia, had reference to an assembly of called out people, again describing a people separated from the world, who have been made the property of the Heavenly Father.

As a matter of fact, no person can be a follower of Christ who is not willing to suffer the badge of being different. He must be willing even to suffer an amount of abuse for having become so. It takes considerable courage, wisdom, patience, and dedication to be different. As my favorite frog Kermit says, "It's not easy being green." But different we are. Different by design.

You can tell a Christian by where he goes. A good Christian will not deliberately frequent certain places—places where he knows ungodly things are taking place. He will not be found in dance halls, bars, or in gambling houses because he knows that what's going on in those places is not in his best spiritual interests. He will not accept invitations to gatherings where he knows the crowd will be comprised of those who are not concerned for moral values — places where he knows his spiritual influences might be blunted. The Christian feels out of place in such gatherings.

You can tell a Christian by who he's with. He knows his associations say something about his character, his moral values, as well as his interests in life. True, he has to live in the world—around people who don't share his code of morality and who are not interested in God, but he does not choose deliberately to surround himself with people of

low morality. He may not be very popular because of having separated himself from such people, but he is disposed to courageously define his choice of friends even in the face of such rejections. Paul says, "Be not deceived; evil companions corrupt good morals" (**1 Cor. 15:33**). I don't know how many times people have come to me to straighten out their lives and when asked how they got so far off course, they remarked: "Well, I just got in with the wrong crowd."

You can tell a Christian by how he talks. It's amazing to me how rapidly this country's language has plummeted into a filthy bog of putridity. Words that once were used only in gutter conversations just a few years ago are now being used in general conversations — and without a blush of embarrassment. Words men would not say in the presence of women just a few years ago are now used by the women themselves—in a pitiful and painful desecration of femininity. The Christian will be noticeably different in this area. You will not hear him cursing, using the name of the Lord flippantly or otherwise using language disrespectful of his Father. You will not hear him telling smutty stories or relaying filthy gossip. Conversely, his speech will be "seasoned with salt" (**Col. 4:6**), designed to enhance the conversation and promote a righteous life. He will speak words of encouragement and edification, in an effort to encourage those to whom he speaks, words build confidence in God. Sometimes he will be conscientiously constrained to speak out against ungodliness and evil, but even then, he will do it with concern for those to whom he must address those corrections, and will do so "in the spirit of meekness" (**Gal. 6:1**). And you will notice by his speech the things that are of interest to him: things like Christ and His church, salvation, heaven — different things like that.

You can tell a Christian by what he is. Building character is what Christianity is all about. God gives ample information as to how he can mold the kind of character that is fit for His approval. As this is being done, he becomes more and more distinctive, sometimes even seemingly odd. It becomes apparent to people that he is more interested in the hereafter than in the here, that his affections are on things above, not on things on the earth (**Col. 3:1-2**), that the time spent here however long it may be is merely a probationary period while he equips himself for the home his Lord has prepared for him (**Col. 3:20-21**). He is a pilgrim, a sojourner. He has taken, as best as he can, complete control of his life and given himself entirely to God. In short, he's just different about things.

