

# YOKEFELLOW



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## Co-Editor's Column A Truly Strong Church (II)

Garland Elkins



### An Often Disregarded, Yet Necessary Requirement For A Strong Church DEFENDING THE FAITH

When false teachers arise teaching doctrines that disturb and divide the brethren, what should the church do? Doubtless, we should do what Jesus and his faithful followers did. They opposed error (I Pet. 2:21; Mat. 15:9; 7:51-60; Gal. 2:4-5). Such action will either slow down, or in many instances, kill error. If it were to do neither of these, a strong church, as individual members, must oppose error in order to be free from the blood of others (Acts 20:26-32).

It seems that, at the very time when the church has every right to expect peace and prosperity, the devil stirs up hardships, errors, persecutions and unfair treatment. This is not surprising (I Pet. 5:8; II Cor. 2:11; 11:3).

When some religious person is brought face to face with the Truth of Christ, and is made to know that he is wrong in his teaching and/or practice, there are two things he may do: either surrender his error and obey God, or yield to Satan and fight, and otherwise act ugly against the Truth. Unfortunately, it is sad but true that the latter course is often chosen.

The Lord wrote letters to the seven churches of Asia (Rev. 1:11). What He commended in those churches is what He would commend in His churches today. Our Lord commended various churches for defending the Truth and opposing error. Though other things may have been condemned by the Lord, in every instance He complimented the various churches for opposing error. Our Lord also commended the church at Ephesus for opposing corrupt deeds or works such as fornication and idolatry (Rev. 2:6).

The church at Thyatira was blamed (Rev. 2:20-23) for tolerating the world in the church. They possessed many graces, but they were deficient in an important one, courage (I Cor. 5:1; Rev. 2:14). We cannot please God merely by leaving evil alone. We must actively oppose it. Space does not permit a detailed study of the seven churches of Asia, but it would be profitable.

It would be ideal if no error were ever taught. Then, there would be no need to oppose error--due to the fact only the Truth was taught. Doubtless, such a situation would please all who love the Lord. It is indeed nothing short of pathetic and shameful that not all will teach the Truth.

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## From The Director

### The Heavens Declare The Glory Of God



"The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament showeth his handiwork" (Psm. 19:1). There are but two alternatives relative to the origin of the universe: natural creation (that all the amazing, imponderable, multitudinous phenomena were the products of an infinite number of accidents and blind chance), or supernatural creation ("In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth," Gen. 1:1). The only specific thing the Bible says about atheism is found in less than one-half of a verse, "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God" (Psm. 14:1; repeated in Psm. 53:1). And, there is never any discussion in God's Word that He may not exist! The evidence that "God is" is overwhelming; the Word simply states this fact, without argument or debate. How can anyone question His existence in light of all that is manifest in the physical universe (as well as in the Sacred Scriptures)?

To question that "there is a God in heaven" (Dan. 2:28) is to be deceived intellectually and spiritually.

A self-important college student said to his eldest brother: "What would you think if I told you that in ten minutes I could produce arguments that would utterly annihilate the Bible?" The brother replied: "About the same thing I would think if a gnat crawled up the side of Mount Everest and said, 'Watch me pulverize this thing with my left hind foot.'"<sup>1</sup>

Never is a reasonable, intelligent answer given by the atheist relative to the origin and purpose of this vast, intricate, orderly universe. Intelligent human beings are simply asked blindly to accept the assumption that nothingness got busy and produced matter and that, denying "intelligence, will and personality in creation,...a blind, fortuitous concourse of atoms...created themselves, shaped themselves, and finally produced our minds and souls, without reason, without purpose, without destiny."<sup>2</sup> Very regretfully, many are so prejudiced against the idea that an infinite, all powerful, all intelligent Being is behind the universe that they summarily, irrationally rule out even the possibility that He exists. They are unwilling objectively to look at the evidence.

It reminds one of the man who, seeing an elephant for the first time, said, "Why, there ain't no such animal."<sup>3</sup>

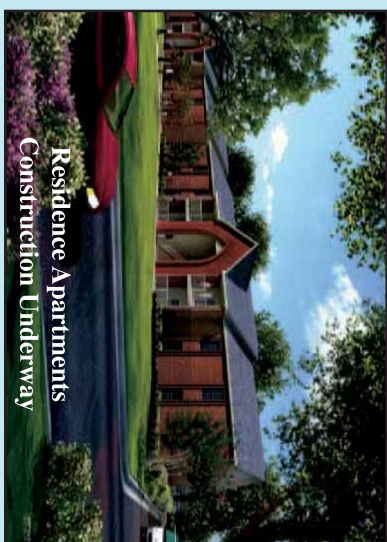
In his book, *Ideas and Opinions*, Albert Einstein wrote,

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I cannot conceive of a genuine scientist without profound faith...Science cannot give us a sense of the ultimate and fundamental ends; they come into being not through demonstration but through revelation. The highest principle for our aspirations and judgments are given to us in the Jewish-Christian religious tradition...Science without religion is lame; religion without science is blind.<sup>4</sup>

Without God, man is but a graduate beast, "floating over the briny sea of life without purpose, without meaning, and without goals. We become merely 'a hunk of flesh and a hank of hair.' Nothing really matters. But if God **does** exist, **everything** matters."<sup>5</sup> The glory of God is seen in the heavens, i.e., "things in heaven and things on earth and things under the earth" praise His name (Phil. 2:9-10).

Astronomy is unique among the sciences. In scope it includes the entire universe, including much of the earth itself. It is the most limited of sciences in the sense that it can perform no experiments—it can only observe. Astronomy is possibly the most intriguing of all the sciences...

What does astronomy have to do with the Christian? Does a Christian see anything different through a telescope than does the non-Christian? In a way, yes...David [in Psalm 19:1-3] saw God's glory in the heavens; they spoke to him in a language understandable to all. However, most astronomy textbooks do not devote any space to the glory of God. Clearly most astronomers have missed something—they see something different in the sky than David did...even though most astronomers have been blind to the glory of God in the heavens, they have enabled us to see it better.<sup>6</sup>

Dear reader, what do you hear when you listen to the speech, the language of the heavens?

For the invisible things of him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even his everlasting power and divinity (Rom. 1:20).

Paul saw that the marvelous precision, the indescribable beauty, and the immeasurable vastness of the sky, the sunlight, the solar system, the stars, and galaxies could not create themselves; he saw the Uncaused Cause, the Prime Mover, the infinitely powerful, wise, Mind, He Who is so abundantly evident that those who reject Him shall stand before Him at the last day "without excuse." On the other hand, the evidence is not so forceful that mankind is so overwhelmed as not to have the choice of rejecting the evidence if he is so determined. Even God cannot/will not infringe upon man's free will! One can reject the truth, receive "a working of error, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be judged..." (II Thess. 2:10-12). There is the atheistic interpretation of the evidence (the **facts** of science, what is actually observable in the empirical realm), as well as the theistic interpretation. One's responsibility is to be able to separate, distinguish each interpretation from the evidence and determine which interpretation is warranted by the evidence (much like with a jury in the courtroom, except that one is dealing with his *immortal soul* in this decision). Biases, prejudgments, and/or the refusal objectively to look at the evidence is the height of folly.

#### ENDNOTES

1 W. A. Criswell, **In Defense of the Faith** (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1973), pp. 17-18.

2 Ibid., pp. 18-19.

3 Fred John Meldau, **Why We Believe in Creation not Evolution** (Denver, CO: Christian Victory Publishing Company, 1961), p. 19.

4 Russell V. DeLong, **So You Don't Believe in God** (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1976), pp. 9-10.

5 Ibid., p. 11.

6 Paul Steidl, **The Earth, the Stars, and the Bible** (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1979), pp. 1-2.

Curtis A. Cates

## RAY PETERS RESTORED!

On Wednesday August 17, 2005, brother Ray Peters was restored. Ray responded to the invitation, making things right, and restoring fellowship with the church here at Cartersville (Georgia). Many of you knew that at one time we were the sponsoring congregation for Ray's work in Latvia. We rejoice with Ray in his decision to return to the Lord. Our many prayers have been answered.

Ray is a man with great ability. It is our prayer that he will use his ability for the furtherance of the Gospel of Christ.

*Bobby D. Gayton (MSOP-1975), preacher at the Cartersville Church of Christ.*

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Who is responsible for the error that hinders the cause of Christ, and that divides into parties and factions? We can easily answer this question by ascertaining who teaches error. The fault lies not with those who teach the Truth, and who are open in their opposition to false doctrines. The responsibility rests squarely upon the shoulders of those who teach error.

We are not ignorant of Satan's devices (II Cor. 2:11). It is always the claim of innovators and leaders of all kinds of divisive doctrines that it was not their teaching that caused division. It is their incredible contention that it was the opposition to their error that was responsible for the division! Discerning persons should be able to see: (1) Their false teaching is the direct cause of trouble. (2) Our opposition to their error is our immediate reaction. (3) The inevitable result of their error will be division. (4) Eternal punishment will be the final reward to all unrepentant false teachers (II Jno. 9-11; Gal. 1:8-9; Rev. 22:18-19). What should the church do when it learns that false teaching is being done? In a proper Christian attitude, the church should seek to prevail upon such teachers to cease their false teaching (Mat. 22:1-46; 15:1-20; I Pet. 2:21; Phil. 2:5; Gal. 2:4-5; Rom. 16:17-18). False teachers could quickly stop false doctrine by ceasing to teach error. This would cause all faithful Christians to rejoice.

If this is not done, preachers, elders and the entire church have only one course open, and that is to defend the Truth and oppose false teaching. Most false teachers adopt a martyrdom stance. Having originated their erroneous teaching, they then insist that it be accepted. When faithful brethren oppose them, they cry "foul" even though they may be meddlers in other men's matters (I Pet. 4:15-16). They seek to convince all of their teaching and insist that they be not opposed. This writer has found this to be true of almost every person whose teaching has disturbed the church. Let it be stated again that it is not only a privilege, but also the duty of all Christians to oppose error with all of their might—even though it may be, in some cases, that some such teachers are among our closest friends and nearest relatives (Gal. 1:10; Mat. 10:34-39).

There is no greater curse to the souls of men than error. It keeps honest people out of the church. It will retard the growth of the church and even divide the body of Christ. False doctrine is sin, and sin will cause souls to be lost in hell (Psa. 9:17; Mark 9:44). Because we love the souls of men, we are obligated to do all we possibly can to save the lost (Acts 2:22-40; Jas. 5:19-20). Thus, a strong church will defend the faith.

#### GOSPEL BROADCASTING NETWORK

GBN has announced its launch date, Saturday, Nov. 26, 2005, 12:00 A.M. EDT. The television network, overseen by the elders of the Highland Church of Christ in Dalton, Georgia, will broadcast 24/7, via cable, direct-to-home satellite, and on the worldwide web at [www.gbntv.org](http://www.gbntv.org). Those interested in further information may contact: GBN, POB 23604, Chattanooga, TN 37422. Phone: (423) 893-7807; toll-free: (866) 525-4677.

## O. B. PORTERFIELD PASSES

Brother Oliver Porterfield, long-time gospel preacher of Montgomery, Alabama, recently passed to his reward. My memories of brother Porterfield go back to my teenage years; he loved the Lord and endeavored faithfully to proclaim His Sacred Scriptures.

When I was in Alabama Christian High School and College in the late 1950s and 1960s, he and I worked for the same company, **The Montgomery Advertizer/Alabama Journal**. He was in the office, and I had all of the **Advertizer** paper racks on Maxwell Air Force Base, trying to work my way through school.

Brother O. B. was preaching for the great Rock Hill congregation (near Luverne, where I later preached), also. When I started preaching in 1958, I would hear him on radio as I would drive each Sunday to my preaching appointment. He later would preach for the Seibles Road church in Montgomery. The last time I got to attend Seibles Road was to hear the great preacher E. R. Harper.

Brother Porterfield was a friend and a tremendous encouragement to me, and our prayers go to sister Porterfield and the family.

Curtis A. Cates

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