

DANGEROUS NONSENSE (cont'd)

Dangerous nonsense: Predictions of the end times. Since the Apostles asked Jesus in Matthew 24:3, "what will be the signs of your coming, and of the end of age?" (end of the world, KJV), the religious world has been flooded with the prognosticators of the second advent, the date-setters, the prophets of doom, the writers of million-dollar best seller books warning of the eminent rapture and the end of the world, all of whom have presented failed apocalyptic outbursts of doomsday predictions. They see what the media says about the problems in the Middle East (where "the end" always begins), then make their doomsday predictions, flood the "Christian" bookstores with latest books, draw crowds eager to be tantalized with the latest word concerning the end of these perilous times, then nothing happens. The problem is these endsayers never explain or apologize when they're proven wrong (and they always are). They back off, wait awhile, update their predictions, adjust their scenarios, and start all over again...and their followers don't seem to mind and never hold them accountable for what they say and write. And the bookstores continue to stock their shelves with this religious trash, and Christians continue to buy them. Bernard McGinn, professor of Historical Theology at the University of Chicago Divinity School has written a book entitled *Anti-Christ, Two Thousand Years of The Human Fascination with Evil* in which he traces ridiculous beliefs concerning prophecy and the anti-Christ from the days of the "Church Fathers" (who lived a generation or so after the Apostles) down to our present day. Church Father Hippolytus (A.D. 170-236) predicted the world would end in A.D. 500, based on his analysis of the dimensions of Noah's Ark.

Prophecy preachers have for years stamped deep impressions on the hopes and fears of sincere people with their presentation of myths, lies and idiocy regarding the so-called rapture, the anti-Christ, the great tribulation, rebuilding the temple, the Middle East wars, the second coming of Christ, the end of the world, the birth of a red heifer in Israel (an event which tantalized many modern prophecy preachers and was reported at length in *Newsweek*), the Y2K scare, and a host of tantalizing tales of the terrestrial. We do not have to read professor McGinn's book to know this. In 1926 Oswald J. Smith, a leading missionary statesman of his day set the date of the Antichrist and Armageddon as 1933. In our day prophecies are usually based upon media coverage of world events, especially events in the Middle East. In the September 1995 issue of *Decision* magazine Billy Graham wrote: "Each day as we read the newspapers or watch the news on Television, we are reminded of the signs Jesus told us to look for. We are seeing them today...every indication is that it will be sooner than we think." We have heard Pat Robertson in his 1995 fundraiser for the 700 Club warn that "your dollars may not be any good in five years..." Jack Van Impe, popular Bible prophecy teacher, said the world will end between "2001 and 2012." (He no longer claims to know the exact date of Christ's coming). There is, of course, Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth* in 1977 in which he warned readers to "make no plans beyond 1985" and continuing with his latest works of fiction, saying the same things, only changing the dates. John F. Walvoord, former president of Dallas Theological Seminary, authored the book *Armageddon, Oil and the Middle East Crises* in 1974 and revised it in 1990 to correct some false

prophesies, predicted that a ten-nation Mediterranean confederacy was about to arise whose leader would force Israel to make peace with the Arabs and this, he wrote "will mark the end of the time of the Gentiles and the beginning of the final years of history." Fundamentalist preacher the late Jerry Falwell predicted in 1999 that the second coming would probably be within 10 years. What more can we say about Chuck Smith, "the rapture will occur in 1981." Edgar Wisenant published a book *88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will be 1988, then 1989*. Charles Dyer predicted the end would occur on Oct. 28, 1992. Herold Camping predicted the world would end in 1994, then predicted the rapture would be on May 21, 2011, followed by the end of the world on October 21 of the same year. Ronald Weinland, a Church of God "prophet" predicted the coming of Christ would be on September 29, 2011. Since this did not happen he set more dates. He was convicted of tax evasion in 2012 and sentenced to 3½ years in federal prison. Greg Lowrie, pastor of Harvest Christian Fellowship in Riverside, California, said "analysis of the escalating tensions between North Korea and the U.S. shows a nuclear war between the two powers fits the end time prophesy." There is a host of other date-setters and prophets of doom such as the latest *Left Behind* series by Tim LaHay and Jerry Jenkins. William M. Alnor in *Soothsayers of The Second Advent* stated it well: "Soothsayers have done damage to immature believers and many have been wounded by numerous false predictions. Some have turned their speculations regarding the second coming of Christ into massive businesses and have profited handsomely from their wild guesses." The world laughs at the church and assumes if it is not right on these ridiculous predictions it is not right on anything else. This is dangerous nonsense.

Dangerous Nonsense: Religious Agnosticism. The word *agnostic* literally means "without knowledge," and the agnostic says we cannot know anything for certain when it comes to the things of God. Webster defines agnosticism as: "a person who holds the view that any reality (as God) is unknown and unknowable." The word is always applied to unbelievers; however, many Christians have the same idea about the Bible as the agnostic has toward God...we just can't know and understand it. We can understand the world's ignorance of the things of God because they are "darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart...and have become callous..." (Eph. 4:18:19). However, ignorance among the people of God is without excuse. Ignorance is disobedience (Rom. 10:3) and sins committed in ignorance in Israel had to be dealt with and demanded sacrifice (Heb. 9:7). Even worship can be "worship in ignorance" (Acts 17:23). It was "lack of knowledge that destroyed Israel and took them into captivity (Hos. 4:6, Isa. 5:13). One of the most appalling phenomena evident in today's church is the rampant ignorance and lack of understanding of the Scripture. Many young men coming out of our Bible Colleges and Seminaries have only a scant understanding of the Word of God.

Concerning the Apostle Paul's writings, the Apostle Peter stated that "in all his epistles are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction" (II Peter 3:16). He did not say they could not be understood, but they were "hard" to understand. The common conception today among many, if not

most, church members and many preachers, is that we just cannot understand the Bible. The idea is that we are not expected to understand and it just doesn't make any difference anyway. But is this true? Not if we believe Ephesians 5:17: "So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is." The will of the Lord is revealed in the Scriptures; therefore, this is a direct command of God that we are to understand. How can we say the Bible is intended to be "mysterious" and "beyond understanding," if it is a *revelation* from God? There are some things in the New Testament called "mysteries" but wherever the word is used the "mystery" is revealed and explained. Romans 16:25, 26 states: "Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the *revelation of the mystery* which has been kept secret for long ages past, but *now is manifested* by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been *made known* to all the nations, leading to obedience of faith." The Apostle Paul further stated: "...When you read you *can understand* my insight in the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now *been revealed* to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit" (Eph. 3:4,5). Concerning his preaching of the word he said: "that is the mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations; but has *now been manifested* to His saints" (Col. 1:26), and "praying...that we may *speak forth the mystery of Christ.*" The mysteries of Scripture were "things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him," (a favorite funeral text and passage used by those who insist that we cannot know these things until we die and go to heaven) but "to us God *revealed* them through the Spirit." (I Cor 2:9,10). The Apostle continues: "now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that *we might know* the things freely given to us by God" (ver.12). He then says, "we have the mind of Christ" (ver. 16). How can anyone who has the mind of Christ remain ignorant of his word and will?

Regarding our understanding of things revealed, Moses wrote long ago: "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law" (Deut. 29:29). There were many "secret things" of which the Old Testament saints had no revelation. For example, God's purpose and grace in Christ. II Timothy 1:9,10: "...His own purpose and grace was granted to us in Christ Jesus from all eternity, but *now* has been *revealed* by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus." The Apostle further says: "The Scripture has shut up all men under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe, but before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was *later to be revealed*" (Gal. 3:22, 23). There are some things in the New Testament that have not been revealed and are therefore some of the "secret things that belong to the Lord our God." I John 3:2: "Beloved, now we are the children of God and it has not appeared yet what we shall be." And Romans 8:18: "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us."

Some of the most controversial and argumentative passages of scripture are the very ones the Apostle says he would "not have you ignorant about" or about which he asks. "do you not know?" He says we are not to be ignorant about those who have died (I Thess. 4:13), yet due to emotionalism, sensational preaching and

prophesy experts, this is one of the most misunderstood subjects of the Bible.

In I Corinthians 6 Paul asks the question "do you not know" six times. This infers that they should have known these things. "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? do you not know that we shall judge angels?" (ver. 2, 3). Why was it important that they know this? Not knowing these things was affecting their life as a church. They were going to law with one another before a worldly court. Paul states this was a shame and a defeat in the church. Only when we know the Scriptures and live by them can we avoid entanglements with the world. "Do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?" (ver. 9). Paul lists those whom he calls "unrighteous, "fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate, homosexuals, thieves, covetousness, drunkards, revilers and swindlers." Sadly, too many of these "unrighteous" people are not only a part of our churches, many are leaders. David Bercot stated it well in *The Kingdom That Turned the World Upside Down*: "Either a person's heart is entirely devoted to God's kingdom, or it is devoted to the kingdoms of this world. We can't have a divided heart or serve two masters." Evidently some of the Corinthians did not know this. The next three times Paul asks this question, it has to do with our physical bodies and immorality. "Do you not know your bodies are members of Christ?" (ver. 15); "Do you not know that the one who joins himself to a harlot is one body with her?" (ver. 16); "Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God and you are not your own?" (ver. 19). Evidently some of the Corinthians, like many today, did not know the reality of the fact that our bodies are members of Christ and we are indwelt, in our physical bodies by the Holy Spirit, and this is to determine the course of our actions, not only concerning immorality but every facet of our lives. He stated this in II Corinthians 12:20, 21: "For I am afraid that perhaps when I come I may find you to be not what I wish and may be found by you to be not what you wish; that perhaps there may be strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputed, slanders, gossip, arrogance, disturbances; I may mourn over many of those who have sinned in the past and not repented of impurity, immorality and sensuality which they have practiced." When the church ignores the presence of the Holy Spirit in individual lives immorality and every evil sin flourishes.

The Apostle uses the term "do you not know?" two times in Romans 6 in answer to the question: "how shall we who died to sin live in it?" (ver. 2) He asks: "do you not know" then answers the question in verses 3-11. Because they did not know, they were advancing the idea that a Christian could continue sinning and the grace of God would take care of it. He then asks, "shall we continue in sin because we are not under the law but under grace?" and answers this question in verses 16-23. These passages show that it is important to know what the Scripture says about sin and grace. At this point we can paraphrase Paul's statement in Romans 10:14, 15: "How shall they know if they do not hear and how shall they hear without a preacher?" Just how much is preached in our churches today concerning sin and grace? How much Scripture is actually taught in churches? Why are so many of our pulpits today filled with so many want-to-be-psychologists and entertainers? Why do most Christians and many preachers say we cannot know and understand the Bible? Perhaps if our Bible Colleges, Seminaries, and preachers would major on the Bible and less on contemporary worship and church administration we would see a difference in the church's knowledge and understanding of the Bible.