

[c.1984. This essay, along with two others, was submitted by Gordon Clark to Allen Guelzo of the Reformed Episcopal Seminary for inclusion in the latter's book, a collection of essays titled Ambitious to Be Well Pleasing. Because of space constraints "Desultory New Testament Curiosities" was not chosen, but Clark's essay "Lord God of Truth" did make the cut.]

DESULTORY NEW TESTAMENT CURIOSITIES

In the New Testament there are many peculiarities that stimulate our curiosity as we read rapidly along. At other verses no stimulation occurs because we think we have perfectly understood the meaning, when as a matter of fact we have misconstrued the passage. We are satisfied because we do not realize that we are mistaken. In the first case we are puzzled, and we are conscious of a difficulty. We wonder unsatisfied. Commentaries are a great help most of the time; but often the commentators do not recognize our problem, either because they think it too trivial to explain, or more likely because our individual misinterpretation has not occurred to them. Therefore almost without exception commentaries explain or discuss the great theological problems, but the oddities seem too insignificant. Yet even as they are interesting, enticing, and sometimes frustrating.

The fact that they are usually far less important than the great theological doctrines should not cause us to ignore them. All Scripture is profitable for doctrine and instruction in righteousness. If God has given it all to furnish us thoroughly for every good work, we are obligated to study it all. Perhaps what seems trivial at first sight, a mere curiosity, carries implications of considerable value. And anyway puzzles are fun.

These oddities are of several kinds. The more obvious are difficult verses that puzzle the best commentators. Others are verses which, because of childhood's lack of experience, we once misunderstood and perchance cleared up in later life. When I was a boy and read Matt. 4:7, 10; I thought in my ignorance that Jesus meant: 'you have no business tempting me, for I am God and no one dare tempt God; furthermore, Get thee hence, Satan, for since I am God, thou shouldst worship and serve me, not I thee.' At that early age I hardly knew what a commentary was. Years later the true meaning dawned on me. Jesus not only insisted that God alone should be worshipped, and that therefore he should not bow down before Satan, but also, in that particular

situation, he, Jesus, should not tempt God by anything so foolish as jumping off the pinnacle of the temple, expecting the Father to save him from crashing his skull against the stones. This principle of acting rationally, and not indulging in spectacular stupidities, applies to us as well.

Such misunderstandings are very individual matters, and what has puzzled one person may not puzzle another. I would guess that very few people ever made this mistake of mine. Such will suffice for a descriptive introduction. We may now begin on the problems themselves.

Matthew 7:1 “Judge not, that ye be not judged,” unlike Matt. 4:7, 10, is very frequently, almost universally misunderstood; and the misunderstanding seriously distorts the conduct of ministers and communicant members so that the effective life of the church is impaired. Most people, at least just about all the people whose opinion I have heard or surmised, think that the verse prohibits us from condemning anyone, on pain of God’s condemning us. We should love everyone, especially church members; and we should see no evil, speak no evil, and think no evil. But this interpretation is pure monkey business.

Other Christians, who are troubled by the utter laxity of such conduct, try to preserve their integrity by allowing us to condemn the sin but never the sinner. This is at least the lesser of two blunders.

Even without understanding the verse, one can see that these interpretations are wrong because they contradict a number of other and clearer passages in the Bible. I remember a pastor of a church located in what was almost a rural slum. One or two of the members judged or condemned him for having condemned a popular modernistic minister. Apparently these members could condemn him but he could not condemn the modernist. The poor pastor called their attention to I John 4:1, “Believe not every spirit, but evaluate [or, test] the spirits whether they are of God, because many false prophets are gone out into the world . . . and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist.” The ‘spirits’ referred to are not disembodied devils, but rather human beings who are false prophets. John tells us to judge them.

It is therefore proper to condemn even a generally orthodox minister when he preaches or approves of heresy. It is proper even to rebuke an apostle when he does so. Paul rebuked Peter to his face, probably not because of anything he said, but because of the heretical implications of his conduct. And Paul certainly condemned the Judaizers in most vigorous language.

Peter of course repented of his sin and when he wrote his epistles he also condemned a rising tide of false prophets. In his second epistle (2:1) he vigorously castigates false teachers and false prophets on the ground that they bring in damnable heresies. He also warns his addressees not to follow their pernicious ways. And so through chapter two. Note also Jude's similar condemnations in verses 4, 8, 11, 16, 19. Such Scriptural language is not often heard from our pulpits today, a fact that illustrates how far contemporary churches have fallen.

Someone might demur by pointing out that Peter and Jude mention no names. But they must remember that Paul mentioned several names: for example, Hermogenes, Demas, Alexander; nor were the individual Judaizers in Galatia unknown to the Galatians. Peter and Jude did not mention names because they were warning many churches of many false teachers. There was a rising tide of heretical teaching, which maybe in the first century, but surely in the second, went so far as to publish altered manuscripts of the apostolic autographs. In these and similar cases, it is not only proper, it is obligatory to judge and condemn.

Because of these verses in later parts of the New Testament, one can easily see that the interpretation under discussion is wrong. But what then is right? What can the verse mean; Let us read it more carefully. In the phrase "that ye be not judged," the verb is an aorist subjunctive and the phrase is introduced by the conjunction *ina*. Unfortunately most Christians do not know Greek. The reader therefore must either take my word for it, or consult a competent seminary professor. At any rate, attention to the two points mentioned suggest a slightly expanded translation such as 'Judge not in such a way that thou shalt be judged.' Or, 'Do not judge so as to be judged.' With such an exegesis Matthew no longer contradicts Paul, Peter, and Jude.

Matthew 15:19, "For out of the heart come evil reasonings." Such statements as these by Jesus in the Gospels were made in reference to special concrete situations. Not surprisingly they apply to other similar circumstances. We all tend to understand such verses in conjunction with whatever is uppermost in our mind at a given time. Their significance for other cases often escapes us.

Here Jesus is contrasting purely ceremonial behavior, the external visible actions, with the internal motives. The two may conform, when devout people so conduct themselves. But too often there is no conformity. The Pharisees complained that Jesus' disciples ate their meals without first washing their hands. This was a transgression of the law. The Pharisees required everyone to pour water on both hands before eating, holding a water pot between the knees. If

the two hands were not ‘washed’ simultaneously, but one after the other, it was necessary to avoid touching the clean hand with the still unclean hand and so defiling the former. Because of the inconvenience of holding the water jug between the knees, it was better to have another person pour the water over one’s hands. It was legal for even a monkey to do the pouring.

The water itself must be clean and must not have been previously used for any other purpose. Nor must it later be used for anything else. Since the uncleanness extended to the wrist, the wrist must be sprinkled. But if the water spreads farther up the arm and then flows back on the clean hand, the hand is again polluted. To prevent this, one must hold the hand with the fingers pointing to the ground. There are also other Pharisaical requirements but these are enough to picture the situation as the Pharisees upbraided Jesus and his disciples.

Today, however, we do not suffer under such a situation. Therefore we are likely to look on the passage as a rebuke to hypocrisy or ceremonialism, without noticing other implications. Surely many mature Christians have been taken aback, when, in perplexity, a very well-known verse suddenly applies itself in an unanticipated manner. In this passage it is clear that Jesus stresses the inner intention as contrasted with an external mechanical ceremony. But is there not a wider application of the words, “Out of the heart come evil reasonings”?

In this century, so it seems to me, and for that matter off and on throughout church history, various groups have emphasized various degrees of mystical experiences, hunches, and dreams, and have downgraded doctrinal truth. At present those who claim to be evangelical frequently contrast the head and the heart. They are afraid of ‘cold’ intellectualism and prefer ‘warm-hearted’ confusion. Such mentalities may well dismiss such a fear, for they run little danger of being too intellectual. Despite all their fervor and prominent piety, their views are unbiblical and they fail to understand this passage and others like it.

First of all, the Bible nowhere, absolutely nowhere, contrasts the head and the heart. The Old Testament often contrasts the heart and the lips: “This people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me” (Isa. 29:13). Indeed, Matthew had just quoted this passage in verses 8 and 9. It is the contrast between the heart and the lips. The contemporary contrast between head and heart is totally unscriptural.

The implication favors what we may call intellectualism rather than mysticism or emotionalism. I have translated the verse a little more forcefully and perhaps more literally than the well-known translations. They translate *dialogismoi* as *thoughts*. This is not inaccurate. But

the connotation is rather *arguments, discussions, and reasonings*. It means calculation, a balancing of accounts (a very appropriate meaning in this verse), a debate, and sometimes a judicial inquiry. If there is any mental state it does not mean, it is emotion.

Now, the point is this: that which calculates, reasons, and debates is the *heart*, not the head. Possibly once in ten cases the *heart* designates the emotions. But in roughly eighty percent of its occurrences in the Old Testament it means the intellect or the intellect and the will. Already in 9:4 Matthew has attributed reflection or planning to the heart. In this context the word refers to the judgment or conclusion that Jesus is a blasphemer. This may have stimulated the emotion of anger; but the stimulus was an intellectual judgment. To cite one other verse, Acts 28:27 quotes the Old Testament, so that both Testaments identify the heart as that which thinks and understands.

With this linguistic information we may now apply Matt. 15:19 beyond the limits of Pharisaic ceremonialism. Why were the Pharisees so evil? Because their intellectual apprehensions were incorrect. Their reasonings were evil. Overt action is the result of prior thinking, whether good or evil. The external behavior of a hypocrite may seem good because he thinks it good to deceive the public. A truly pious person may succumb to temptation, having thought poorly for a time; but his fundamental convictions will eventually show themselves in his conduct. To state it in doctrinal terms: justification inevitably, slowly perhaps, but inevitably produces sanctification.

Matthew 16:7, 8. When Jesus warned the disciples to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, the disciples wondered whether Jesus was rebuking them for having forgotten to bring bread with them as they went into the desert. The translation says, "They began to discuss among themselves." The verb means *consider* or *discuss*. It bears a slight connotation of discussing *among* themselves, one with another. But the preposition has the connotations of within, each silently in his own mind. Knowledge of Greek will not help in deciding which meaning is correct. The latter meaning would indicate that Jesus knew their inner thoughts, giving thereby an evidence of his supernatural powers. He knew what other people were thinking without their telling him. Therefore "Jesus did not commit himself to them, for he knew all men ... he knew what was in man" (John 2:24, 25). More clearly: "the scribes ... reasoning in their hearts [not out loud] 'Why does this man speak blasphemies?' ... And immediately when Jesus perceived in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves ... (Mark 2:7, 8). Such verses contribute to the

establishment of the doctrine of the Deity of Christ and we Bible-believing Christians want that, don't we? But our desire to defend the Deity of Christ does not guarantee that our interpretation of this or that verse is correct. What Matthew's words do not clearly say, Mark's do. Instead of the phrase *en autois*, Mark has *pros allēlous*, and this can mean only "with each other." The lesson to be learned is the usefulness of a harmony of the Gospels.

Matthew 19:3. The Pharisees had come to Jesus to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for every cause?" The RSV has "for any cause." The NAS has "for any cause at all." Neither of these two translations makes much sense, for they seem to ask 'Is divorce ever permissible?' This is a foolish question because all the Jews allowed that divorce was permissible in some circumstances. True, the Pharisees were strict and the Sadducees were not; but no one prohibited divorce absolutely. That was a later heresy of the Romish and Anglican churches. The NIV is better when it says, "for any and every reason." The KJ's "for every cause" is good enough.

What the scribes, the priests, the Pharisees and the Sadducees had been arguing about for the previous century concerned which causes legitimized an action for divorce. The Pharisees, who were the strictest party, held that the only sufficient reason for divorce was adultery. The Sadducees, or some of them, held that so small a matter as a burnt roast was sufficient. Just how the Pharisees thought they could entrap Jesus is not too clear. Perhaps they hoped he would show some measure of laxity.

If this was their aim, they were disappointed. First of all, Jesus explains that the original, Edenic sinless state-envisaged no divorce at all. Then "because of the hardness of your hearts" Moses permitted divorce. Jesus concludes that fornication or adultery is the only justification for divorce. Thus Jesus sided with the Pharisees against the Sadducean laxity.

However, this raises another problem for today's Christians. Paul in I Cor. 7:15 allows divorce by the Christian party, usually the wife, when her unbelieving husband deserts her. Has Paul then loosened the strictures of Christ? No, for a reason that was more obvious in Paul's day than in ours. The society which Jesus and the Pharisees moved was very strictly Jewish. In spite of Roman rule, which considerably altered the procedures of other ancient nations, the Jews still considered themselves a theocratic, even defeated, theocratic state. The marriages they contemplated were all within the Covenant. But when the Mosaic dispensation¹ was completed,

¹ I do not use the term in the sense of modern dispensationalism.

when the Gentiles entered into the Abrahamic covenant, as Galatians explains, the situation was altered. Now one of the married couple could be in the covenant and the other not. The wife, or more likely the husband, had not been converted. This was a situation the Pharisees had not envisaged. Hence Paul addressed a problem that played no part in the earlier debate.

No one knows how many in Corinth took advantage of Paul's permission. Nor do I know of any such American case, i.e. where desertion is the only ground. There was, however, an earnest Presbyterian whose wife, with ever increasing hostility to Christianity, finally divorced him, married a second husband, divorced again for some reason or other, married a third man, and then I lost track of her. The minister, with his children whom their mother did not want, after some time found another very attractive woman, also with several children. The two of them, both with all their children, attended a church service one Sunday evening, and all who knew the situation expected a marriage. But something happened, but I have not the faintest idea why they changed their minds.

Or, again, if the Archbishop had not pressured Princess Margaret to break her engagement to the army captain -- a reputable man with whom a marriage would have satisfied every Biblical requirement -- she would have escaped later misfortunes.

Matthew 22:29, 42, "Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God ... [and] Jesus asked them, What think ye of Christ, whose son is he? They say unto him, David's."

It may puzzle the reader to see these two verses conjoined, for they seem to have nothing in common except that they are both statements by Christ. The context of the first verse is the possibility of a resurrection of the dead and marriage in the life beyond the grave. Verse 42 concerns a question about the Messiah and the meaning of Psalm 110. Yet as such they both exemplify Christ's methodology and instruct us today how to handle certain religious questions and how not to. These verses and others so disturb us because they reveal our limitations, and this revelation in some cases is so overwhelming that devout people often conclude that no mere man can understand this or that part of the Bible.

Unfortunately it is not modesty but devout arrogance to maintain this conclusion. First, if Mr. X cannot understand this verse, one should not conclude that Mr. Y cannot understand it. Second, it is devout arrogance because God gave us the Scripture for our understanding. "All Scripture is profitable for doctrine." To say that some of it is incomprehensible or inscrutable is to impugn the wisdom of God. Naturally there are some verses you and I do not understand. But

perhaps the minister in the next town does. There may even be verses that no one now understands. Even Peter complained that Paul was sometimes difficult to understand. But by the inspiration of the Spirit Paul, Isaiah, and the others wrote in order to be understood.

The two verses in question are parts of Christ's discussion with the Sadducees and the Pharisees. The first concerns the idea of the resurrection and the difficulties in thinking it through. Here was a woman who had, quite legally, seven husbands in succession. A little extreme perhaps; but then we all know women who have outlived two or possibly three husbands, so that the case is not an impossible one. Now, if men and women are immortal and if they are raised from the dead, which man shall be the husband of which wife? Will seven men have the same woman in heaven as wife?

Christians today usually have a poor opinion of the Sadducees; nevertheless they asked a pertinent question. As they were the secularists of their day, so the secularists of our day ask embarrassing questions, and we are obliged to answer them. Christ had a definite methodology. The subject matters in the two conversations were different, but the method was the same. Here Christ's answer was, "You are mistaken because you do not know the Scriptures, nor do you know the power of God." That is to say, the reason the Sadducees could not understand the resurrection was ignorance. They were deficient in knowledge. They did not understand the Old Testament. Today thousands of preachers do not understand the New Testament, In addition to the liberals who reject the inerrancy of the Bible, have you ever listened to the outrageous evangelicals on TV who claim apostolic authority?

Ignorance characterizes the second reference also. The situation is conspicuously different, for here it is Jesus who asks the question, and "no one was able to answer him a word." Jesus had asked, How is it that David calls his son his Lord? Jesus wanted to show that the person of the Messiah and his prerogatives did not derive from any earthly king, even King David. Since the Jews at that time had various theories concerning the person and the nature of the Messiah, and since some Jews thought that the Old Testament predicted two Messiahs, it is clear that they did not understand.

Just possibly-- the words "no one dared to answer him a word" is evidence -- some of them caught the hidden meaning. If so, no wonder they did not dare. But at any rate, the immediate stumbling block was ignorance. Their knowledge was deficient.

Jesus' method, in all these disputes, was to appeal to the Scriptures. This was also how he had acted when Satan tempted him in the wilderness. This should be our method also. One should note that he does not appeal to the cosmological argument, nor to emotional experience, nor to any mystic hunch. He appeals to the Scripture. This is the only Christian apologetic.

But this is not the only lesson we should learn today. Appeal to Scripture is fundamental; but these verses go further and indicate how wide such an appeal can be. At the end of the section on the resurrection Christ concluded, "Have you not read ... 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?' God is not [the God] of the dead, but of the living." No wonder the people were astonished at his doctrine; amazed, astounded, overwhelmed. Really it is deeply disturbing. Christ condemned his enemies because of their ignorance and lack of understanding. But how many of us, had we never read this section, would ever have inferred from the proposition "I am the God of Abraham" that Abraham would be resurrected at the end of earthly history? Can we meet Christ's standards in drawing implications from divine revelation? Are we as keen logicians, as he was? Rather clearly, not.

Nevertheless intelligent thought will continually discover to us implications we never previously suspected. God commands us to meditate on his law day and night. A young girl, a college student, a recent convert, in a substandard congregation, began to read Romans 9. She read it carefully every day for a week or so, thinking about the words as hard as she could. Then she told her minister, who was not so substandard as his congregation, "This passages teaches that God selects us, and that he saves us through pure mercy. I don't like that, but that is what the Bible teaches." This is not a milestone in the history of theology; it is a milestone in her Christian growth, for she seems to have now become a Protestant, an evangelical, and maybe an infant Calvinist.

But there is still more to discuss in Jesus' methodology. These discussions with the Sadducees and Pharisees teach us not to assume that problems are insoluble. We may not be able to answer a question presented to us, but this does not mean that the answer cannot be found in the Bible. True enough, God has not revealed all truth in the Bible. Deuteronomy 29:29 tells us that God has reserved some truths for himself, and we have no means of discovering them or searching them out.

Yet this very important verse in Deuteronomy is not intended to discourage us from searching the implications of what God has revealed and wants us to know. We are commanded

to have the mind of Christ; and if Christ can deduce conclusions from Scriptural propositions, we should try to do the same.

Let me present a case in point. John Murray, late of Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia, impressed many people with his devoutness. He was also an assiduous scholar. And many people considered him very modest and humble. Now, in his booklet, *The Free Offer of the Gospel*, in which his colleague Ned B. Stonehouse cooperated to an undetermined degree, John Murray considered the paradox between the free offer of the gospel and the doctrines of election and irresistible grace. His conclusion is, “We have found that God himself expresses an ardent desire for the fulfillment of certain things which he has not decreed in his inscrutable counsel to come to pass. This means that there is a will to the realization of what he has not decretively willed, a pleasure towards that which he has not been pleased to decree. This is indeed mysterious ...”

Here I do not wish to emphasize what I believe is Murray’s incorrect notion of what the phrase ‘the free offer of the gospel’ means. What strikes me is that the author could not see any logical consistency between the free offer and the divine decree. His word *inscrutable* seems to suggest that nobody else can understand it either.

Such a viewpoint, however, is not one of humility, but of arrogance. It means that if he cannot see the answer, the answer is just not in the Bible at all. But has he traced out all the possible implications of Scripture and shown by a complete induction that a solution is impossible?

In view of the fact that Christ pointed out implications: implications no one had thought of before, and condemned his hearers for not having done so themselves, we, when our thoughts lead us to an assertion of contradictions, should be warned that our thinking has been fallacious. Then instead of appealing with pseudo-piety to inscrutable mysteries, we can review our thinking and perhaps discover our mistakes. This would be a more modest procedure.²

Matthew 23:24, “Woe to you, scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites ... blind guides, which strain at a gnat and swallow a camel.”

² For those who are interested only in the particular problem, instead of being interested in the general method as they should be, two deficiencies in Mr. Murray’s argument may be listed. First, even though he may have the idea of election fairly well in mind, he nowhere gives a clear definition of the free offer of the gospel. Definition is indispensable, for no one can harmonize two concepts unless he knows them both. Second, not only is his textual criticism of II Peter 3:9 poor, but his exegesis is utterly unacceptable. Cf. my commentary on I & II Peter, pp. 90ff. (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980.)

Rabbinical law permitted one to strain wine through a cloth or wicker strainer, even on the Sabbath; and everything that swarms on the ground is an abomination which one must not drink (cf. Lev. 11:41). So far there is no difficulty. But it often happens that the words of an English translation are so familiar to us that we fail to appreciate the force of the original. From our youth up we have heard about straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel. There is nothing wrong with the translations themselves; but the illustration becomes more vivid when other words are used.

Picture a man with a skin of wine. In it are some gnats. He pours the wine through some cheese cloth to strain out the gnats. But as he takes away the cheese cloth, a camel who had been swimming in the goat skin slips into the glass so that the man strains out the gnat and drinks down the camel. The verb is literally 'drink down.' We could bring the illustration up to date, and down to earthy by thinking of dust in a brewery's vat with some dead rats floating around too. Well, rats or pieces of decomposed rats are one thing; but a camel is a bit big. In Matt. 19:24 a camel can hardly squeeze through a small gate in the city wall. Obviously 23:24 is a legitimate hyperbole, although Americans are usually unfamiliar with camels.

Perhaps the more important lesson is that Jesus denounced the enemies of the gospel in vivid language, both here and elsewhere. If we wish to be Christ-like, the following instance will interest us. One should read the whole passage and compare Gal. 1:8, 9 and 5:12.

Matthew 23:23-33. The previous item occurred in the passage now to be quoted. Some of its phrases are: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for ye make clean the outside of the cup ... but within they are full of extortion and excess ... ye are like whited sepulchres ... full of dead men's bones ... Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers ..."

This passage in Matthew is one of several that record Jesus' denunciation of the Pharisees. Here the ground of denunciation is their hypocrisy. In other places we see that they were guilty of misinterpreting the Old Testament. In Galatians Paul curses the Judaizers, not because of hypocrisy -- Peter, Barnabas, and some of the Jews were guilty of hypocrisy-- but "the party of the circumcision" seems to have been exceedingly sincere. It was these latter whom Paul cursed. Hypocrisy is a sin but sometimes sincerity is so too.

These two passages also condemn many sincere people in the churches today; as they have also condemned sections of the church in earlier ages. But particularly in the present age there is an almost unanimous rejection of Paul's and Jesus' instruction.

The present temper of ecclesiastical society, that is, the present opinion of church members and ministers alike, and as well secular opinion regarding how Christians ought to act, disparages and condemns anathemas. Let anathemas be anathema! Speak the truth, or even falsehood, in love. Never criticize anyone. God is love and if fornication and homosexual practices are not very reprehensible, surely mere intellectual divergences in doctrine are too trivial to make a fuss about. God is love and we all are his children: Calvin-- well perhaps not Calvin -- but Protestant, Catholic, left and right; keep the difference out of sight.

This is not what Jesus and Paul taught. It is not Christianity at all.

First, the common concept of love, or rather the utterly foggy and imprecise confusion about love, covers the Christian concept with smog and sour foam. Is it not clear that Mary Baker Eddy's love, which ruled out any form of atoning sacrifice, is quite different from Joseph Fletcher's love that requires adultery every now and then. Both are anti-Christian; but they are also distinct, the one from the other. Christian love is different from both.

Second, whatever the precise concept of Christian love may be, it does not prohibit severe condemnation and anathemas. Christ's treatment of the Pharisees should be well enough known. Paul in Galatians is less well known. But in order to show that these two passages are not odd exceptions to the general tone of the New Testament, the following reminder should lovingly be forced upon recalcitrant modernity. Not to extend the quotations by including the long list of Gospel passages, of which Matthew 23 is a fearful example, we shall begin with the Acts.

Acts 5:3, "Why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Ghost?"

Acts 8:20-23, "May your silver perish with you ... your heart is not right before God ... you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity."

Acts 13:10, "You who are full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of righteousness ..."

In view of the present surge in homosexual licentiousness, which many people want us to welcome with tender loving care, not only in our pews, but even in our pulpits, it is pertinent to quote Romans 1:26-32. "God gave them over to degrading passions ... the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire towards one another ... being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness ... haters of God ... worthy of death."

In I Cor. 5:1-5, Paul berates the Corinthian church for not having excommunicated a man who had married his step-mother. Since the "arrogant" church refused to act, Paul himself with

apostolic authority delivered the man over to Satan for the destruction of his flesh. Here someone is sure to remark that Paul aimed to save the man's spirit. So he did. But harsh words and excommunication come first.

John in his third epistle denounces Diotrephes by name. II Peter and Jude mention no names, but their denunciation of unfaithful religious leaders, false prophets, heretics, and homosexuals is severe.

The conclusion is that New Testament Christianity is not very prevalent today. We need another Savonarola, with lots of caustic soap.

Matthew 23:37, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together ... and ye would not."

This is not only one of the most widely misunderstood verses in the New Testament, but also, perhaps without exception, the most frequently misquoted. It does not say, 'Jerusalem, thou who killest the prophets, how often would I have gathered thee, and ye would not.' This would mean that Jesus sent prophets to Israel on many occasions throughout the Old Testament, and tried to gather them to himself, but because of their own free will, they refused to be gathered. There could hardly be a more erroneous misinterpretation.

Now, note what Jesus actually said. He addresses Jerusalem. The preceding context shows that he had in mind, not the private citizens of the city, but the rulers-- the scribes and Pharisees. The whole passage is a condemnation of the leaders, the officers, the Jewish government of the city. Does the verse now say that the prophets tried to gather these rulers? Not at all. Jesus, through the agency of the prophets, tried to gather "thy children." Jesus' aim in the Old Testament had been to rescue the ordinary citizens from their evil rulers, from Jeroboam, and his golden calf, from Ahab and Jezebel, from Baal, from Athalia, and earlier from the infanticides of Moloch. With occasional but little lasting success. Did those people, the ordinary people, of their own free will, resist the call of Christ? Did the little chicks take it in mind to run away from the hen? Not at all. The verse says nothing of the sort. It was the rulers who "would not." "How often," said Jesus, "How often would I have gathered *thy children*, and *ye* would not." It was the ecclesiastical officers who prevented the people, their children, from hearing the message of salvation -- prevented them by killing the prophets. The whole is not an assertion of

free will, nor of popular resistance, but a denunciation of denominational secretaries and stated clerks.³

Matthew 24:51. Concerning the unscrupulous servant the verse reads that when the owner returns home, “he shall cut him asunder.” NIV and ASV have “cut him in pieces.” The latter is the more literal. Now, I cannot offer any new insight, nor any really better translation. But the Greek is a bit more pointed and picturesque. Some picturesque etymologies have been weakened through centuries of use and no longer preserve their original force. For example, if a woman gets a small food stain on her dress, she may say in modern French that the dress is *abimée*. But originally the verb *abimer* meant to destroy totally. Here in Matthew the original meaning remains: the lord of the household will cut his servant in two.

Matthew 25:1-13, “ten virgins ... took their lamps ... They that were foolish ... took no oil ...” etc. Here is an oddity, neither very important nor profound, but over which a person may puzzle for a few odd minutes. The Greek text does not say, merely, that the five foolish virgins took their lamps when they went out to meet the bridegroom. In the Textus Receptus verse one has “their lamps;” verse 3 has “their own lamps;” and verse 3 also suggests that they did not take “their own” oil. The modern critical text in verse one has “their own lamps;” in verse three it has “their lamps;” and verse three suggests that they did not take “their own” oil. Either way the verses add the emphasis “their own.” In this context the emphatic phraseology is somewhat unusual for Greek style. Note that verse four does not say that the wise virgins took their own oil. Why then the emphasis on the foolish virgins? Well, obviously, to stress their foolishness. Note that in verse eight they are called “morons.” The lesson is obvious; no one can miss it. But doubtless many people miss the clever little touch of “their own.”

Here perhaps is the place to point out a frequent misunderstanding of the application of the parable and other passages like it. Good Christians who particularly accentuate the coming of Christ -- and surely his future advent should be preached with emphasis-- often talk as if the verb *watch* meant to keep looking to see if Christ is about to appear. Their idea is that the object watched or look for is Christ, represented as the bridegroom in the parable. Not at all. The object to be watched is ourselves. We must not be caught without oil in our lamps. We must not be caught in acts of overt sin nor in sinful laziness and unconcern. This is not to say we should

³Anyone somewhat interested should read John Gill’s *The Cause of God and Truth*. He says much more than the little bit I have borrowed from him.

never sleep. The wise virgins slept too. We need our eight hours. Recreation, going on a vacation, is not necessarily unbecomingly. Those who refuse to take a vacation because the devil never takes one, as I have heard a few super-devout persons say, should be reminded that they are not the devil and should not imitate him. We need and ought to renew our strength, but when Christ comes, we should wake up prepared.

Matthew 25:29. Liberal politicians tax and spend, using the coercive force of government to steal from the rich and give to the poor. Some Christians approve. But what do these Christians do with this verse? “To every one who has, shall more be given, and from the ‘have-nots’ shall be taken away even the little they have.” It is strange that many commentaries make no comment on this verse.

The German scholar Max Weber in his great volume *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* argued that Calvinism is essentially capitalistic. His reason was not merely that Calvin wrote a treatise defending the lending of money on interest, but also the actual conduct of the Puritans. Even if Weber exaggerated a point or two, his main thesis is correct; and we today are all too familiar with the anti-Christian harassment of Christian activity by socialists and so-called, liberals. The easiest and most effective means by which a pagan Supreme Court with its legalizing of infant murder, and by which a corrupt bureaucracy can suppress Christianity is by destroying capitalism. If Christians can be impoverished, they will have little clout with a totalitarian government. Freedom of religion requires capitalism and individual initiative. Consider how the Supreme Court has tried to impoverish Bob Jones University on the basis of racial discrimination, even though the rules for student behavior apply equally to all races.

If anyone is unprepared for the economic application of the verse in question, there is hardly any doubt about its spiritual application. The person who works on ten verses of Scripture a day gradually increases in wisdom and the knowledge of God. He who takes one verse and buries it out of sight will shortly reveal himself as an ignorant and worthless servant, to be cast into outer darkness where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Matthew 26:16. This verse and the two preceding verses describe Judas’ bargaining with the Pharisees to betray Christ. After the amount of the bribe was fixed, Judas “from then on sought a propitious time to betray him.”

In the first place, although the translation “they *weighed* out to him thirty pieces of silver” cannot be proved incorrect, yet the more usual meaning of the verb is *set*, *fix*, or *determine*. It is

not clear that the verse means “they *paid* him thirty pieces of silver,” as the RSV has it. No doubt the Pharisees were insane with anger, yet their well-known avarice would probably restrain them from paying before the deed was done. The RSV makes this verse in Matthew contradict the parallel passage in Mark 12:11, where the verb is “promised.” Contradictions, however, do not worry the RSV people.

Secondly, the oddity in the passage is that the Pharisees needed a traitor to betray Christ. Could not they have recognized him without having an agent kiss their victim? What expense! The Pharisees had seen Jesus often enough. He had argued with them. Surely they knew him by sight, even in the dark. It is not odd, however, that they desired stealth and darkness, so as not to risk a rescue and a riot. Of course the soldiers may have needed someone to identify Jesus. At any rate the Pharisees preferred not to appear. They would gloat over him in court.

More odd is Judas’ action after striking the bargain. The words are, “From that time on he sought a propitious moment to betray him.” The wording seems to suggest that Judas expected it would take two or three days to find a satisfactory opportunity.

Maybe he did not so expect. Maybe he betrayed him that very night. Or to put it in other words, he went to the Pharisees immediately after he left the upper room, and led the soldiers to Jesus before midnight. He could easily guess where Jesus would go after the supper. But these details are obscure. Hardly a commentator tries to fix the interval between the bargaining with the Pharisees and the actual betrayal. *The Life of Christ*, by Adam Fabling, a Lutheran scholar (Concordia Publishing House, 1936, 1946) is extremely detailed, extremely; but it lacks even a hint as to the time when Judas met with the Pharisees.

Maybe the difficulty is due to the English connotation of the phrase. When we say ‘from then on,’ we usually have in mind a relatively extended period of time. Perhaps the Greek words *apo tote* did not so definitely connote a lengthy duration. But this is only a guess. It remains an oddity.

Matthew 26:45. It must have always seemed odd to careful readers that Jesus, in the garden of Gethsemane, said, “Sleep on now and take your rest ... Rise let us be going.” The more recent translations, in this place at least, have a better translation: “Are you still sleeping? ... Rise ... the traitor is here.” The reason for the difficulty is that the Greek manuscripts have no question marks, and the King James Version, for some strange reason, took the sentence to be imperative.

Mark 7:3, 4, “The Pharisees and all the Jews, except they wash (*niptōntai*) their hands with their fist, do not eat ... except they wash (*baptisōntai*) they do not eat; and many other things ... washings (*baptismous*) of cups, jugs, brass, and couches.”

Nearly all Baptists (nearly, for I know one who does not) believe that *niptō* means to dip and *baptizō* means to immerse. But the latter verb cannot mean immerse in these verses. The two verbs are used interchangeably; and while cups and jugs can easily be immersed, couches on which guests reclined at a feast must have been washed by pouring.

An oddity in Matt. 15:19 was discussed above. It dealt with one’s washing one’s hands before eating a meal. This was done by pouring. Here the cleansing comes after the Jew returned from the market place. But the verb is *baptisōntai*. One can hardly suppose that even the Pharisees immersed themselves every time they returned home. They poured water on themselves. *Baptizō*, therefore, does not necessarily mean immerse.

There is also an odd textual problem in this verse. The great majority of manuscripts have the verb *baptisōntai*. Couches were ‘baptized.’ But Aleph and B, uniformly held in high regard by liberal critics, read *rantisōntai*. The basic meaning of this verb is *sprinkle*. Can this alteration be explained? Dare we suppose, by pure guesswork, that the scribes who wrote Aleph and B thought that *baptizō* had to mean immerse and therefore ‘corrected’ their manuscripts to read *sprinkle*?

However amusing such guesswork may be, it is really worthless. What is not worthless is that those who wrote the majority of the manuscripts knew Greek as well as anyone else. Even if, and I believe the supposition to be false, but even if they had defective copies of the autographs, their knowledge of Greek, for they were Greeks, assured them that *baptizō* did not mean *immerse*.

Mark 14:20, “one of the twelve that dippeth with me in the dish ...” After reviewing the comments on Matt. 15:19 and Mark 7:4, the reader should note that *embaptomenos* in Mark 14:20 cannot possibly mean *immerse*. Even the piece of bread, much less the whole hand, would not have been immersed. Get some greasy gravy and try it sometime.

This is sufficient for the Synoptics; there is no need to take examples from Luke. But a recent translation adds to the difficulty of a verse in John.

John 1:13, “which were born, not of bloods [note the peculiar plural], nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” obviously tells us of three ways by which it is

impossible to be regenerated. But the nature of these three ways must usually escape the casual reader. Since it is difficult to report what various Christians think, and probably they think nothing about the matter, I shall somewhat professorially exegete the verse.

When John says that believers are not born of bloods (probably referring to Persian blood, Roman blood, but particularly to Jewish blood) he attacks the common Jewish misconception. John 8:39 quotes some of them as saying, "Abraham is our father." Clearly these Jews, if not all, believed they would enter heaven simply because they had descended from Abraham. As a claimant to a throne boasts of his royal blood, so these boasted of Abraham. Jesus says that ancestry does not guarantee regeneration. Regeneration is not racial. Nor is one born "of the will of the flesh." Indeed, this is even less possible, if one may make the comparison. Flesh here means ordinary human nature. If this were the case, salvation would be universal, including Judas, Hitler, and Stalin, "nor of the will of a man." Both in Latin and Greek there are two nouns for *man*. One means *human being*; in general, no one in particular. The other means this individual person. This latter is the word here. No individual can be saved by an act of his will. Arminians in their opposition to total depravity want to base regeneration on the decision of the individual. This is denied throughout Scripture. One must be born again, if at all, by God. Hence the three ways not to be born again are ancestry, general humanity, and individual will.

Now, *mirabile dictu*, a most unusual translation has offered a totally different interpretation of the third impossible method. The NIV has "born not of natural descent, nor of human decision, or of a husband's will." This last phrase is incredible. Most obviously this method of not being born again applies only to women. Is there a third way for men not to be regenerated? Why did John give two methods applicable to all people, and then add one for women only?

Presumably the translators would reply that the word *anēr* means *husband*. Well, sometimes it does. In German a woman can say, *Er ist mein Mann*. But neither in German nor in Greek does the word usually mean husband. It means an individual male in contrast with generic humanity. It occurs in Acts 2:22, 3:2, 5:1, 6:5, fourteen times in I Cor. 11, and a few times elsewhere. These instances may be of small value in exegeting the verse in John; but at least they show that *anēr* does not always mean *husband*. And in John 1:13 *husband* makes utter nonsense.

Acts 7:14, "Then sent Joseph and called his father Jacob to him, and all his kindred, three score and fifteen souls." This statement, made by Stephen before the council that was shortly to

kill him, seems to contradict Genesis 46:26. The Old Testament verse says that “all the souls that came with Jacob into Egypt, which came out of his loins, besides Jacob’s sons’ wives, all the souls were three score and six . . . All the souls of the house of Jacob, which came into Egypt, were three score and ten.” Stephen said seventy-five; the Old Testament says 66 or 70.

Although the precise distribution may be difficult to certify, it is a cinch to show that there is no contradiction. The matter is quite simple: the numbers refer to different groups. In the words quoted above one of the numbers is that of those who came with Jacob into Egypt. This number therefore excludes Jacob himself. It also excludes Benjamin and Joseph. The phrase “out of his loins” excludes the wives of the sons.

A further detailed examination of the Genesis passage can result in more precise figures, but it is a little tedious. That there is no contradiction is perfectly clear from the fact that the figures refer to different groups.

One may also note that present day attacks on the literal veracity of the Scriptures do not emphasize this type of problem so much as last century did. Today’s opposition to infallibility depends more on linguistic theories. Not to mention the protocol sentences of the Logical Positivists, for they are too far left to waste words on Biblical studies, the religious opposition makes use of societal customs, dynamic equivalence, and a form of Schleiermacher’s view that theology is no more than an intellectual attempt to explain a mystic psychological experience. Barth’s phrases are that the Bible is a witness to or an attestation of a revelation given to an ancient prophet. It itself is not a divine revelation. Naturally the prophets made mistakes in their interpretation of their experiences. Those alleged evangelicals who today boast of their experience should not be so prompt in claiming infallibility in explaining it. Furthermore, if religion is based on experience, all religions are equal because one man’s experience is as authoritative as any other’s.

Romans and the two Corinthian letters have their difficulties, indeed a great many. But nearly all relate to systematic theology and do not lie on the low level of this treatise. There are, however, just a few oddities in the remainder of the New Testament, and we shall do what we can with them.

I Thess. 4:16. Although the modern translations are better, many people remember only the KJ version, which says, “The Lord will descend with a shout.” What the shout is, is hard to see in the KJ version. It could be a shout of triumph, or it might be simply some extra noise (an

unlikely guess) in addition to the voice of the archangel and the trumpet of God. Incidentally these verses rather deflate the dispensational concept of a secret rapture. The whole affair is decidedly noisy. But the noise has meaning. It is not just an inarticulate shout. The newer translations are correct in reading “a shout of command.” Now, beyond correct translation, we may try to surmise what the command is. The verse does not explicitly say. Hence our interpretation cannot be called translation. Yet the context makes one particular command a plausible explanation. I suggest that Christ issues the command, Rise! And as Lazarus came forth from the tomb when Jesus said “come forth,” so too shall we rise when he so commands us.

II Thess. 3:17. Since Paul says here that he signs every epistle of his in his own hand, we may conclude that Paul was not the author of Hebrews. True, Hebrews was written later than II Thessalonians. One might therefore object that Paul later failed to follow his earlier custom. But the other later Pauline epistles are signed, either at the end or at the beginning. So much for the verse in question. We shall continue with Hebrews itself.

Hebrews 2:3, 4. At least two curiosities in this section probably escape the notice even of students who read Greek. The first of these is a delightful play on words. The KJ reads, “Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.” The RSV is a slight improvement: “Therefore we must pay closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.” The NAS and NIV are essentially the same. The improvement consists in the use of the verb *drift*. But this one item is a bit insufficient. “To give heed to” or “to pay attention” is a verb which the Greeks used to designate the act of bringing a ship to land. Then the nautical picture is enhanced by the verb “to float by” or “drift away.” Thus the author seems to have a pleasant literary imagination.

The author could not have been the apostle Paul, although he was for a long time thought to have been. One reason is the Greek style of the epistle, is so different from Paul’s. Hebrews has the best Greek style, perhaps with a few verses in Luke, of any New Testament book. Those who do not care to depend on literary style, must remember the verse in II Thessalonians where Paul says he signs his letters. I Thess. 4:18 and Gal. 6:11 support this position. But Hebrews is not signed.

There is also some obscure but pertinent information in Heb. 2:3, 4. Here “the great salvation, which having begun to be spoken by the Lord, was made certain to us by those who heard, God with and in addition to them bearing witness by signs and wonders ...” With the

slightest care one can see that the author of the epistle cannot have been one of the original twelve. Less evident, he cannot have been Paul, either; for in Gal. 1:12 ff. Paul says he did not receive the gospel from men, but he received it by the revelation of Jesus Christ. The author of Hebrews received the Gospel from those who had previously heard it.

Hebrews 2:10, unlike some of the previous examples which have been only careless misunderstandings, presents a more substantial difficulty. The KJ translation is, “For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory [though verse 8 indicates that this has not happened yet] to make the captain of their salvation perfect through suffering.”

Now, offhand, the *him* of the first phrase seems to refer to Christ, for, in addition to the non-conclusive but immediately preceding reference to Christ, the two phrases “for whom are all things” and “by whom are all things” distinctly bring Christ to mind. In support of this John 1:3 says that all things, the whole universe, was made by Christ, and without him was not anything made that was made. Even more explicit is Col. 1:16, “By him were all things created that are in heaven and that are in earth ... all things were created by him and for him.” In addition to the universal extent of Christ’s creative act, the two phrases in Col. 1:16, “by him and for him” closely resemble the two phrases in Heb. 2:10. That the *him* in Col. 1:16 refers to Christ and not to the Father is indisputably clear in verses 14-15, and 17-20. Verse 17 in particular is important. The KJ says, “by him all things consist.” The verb *consist* has several possible meanings. The NAS, RSV, and NIV translate it “in him all things hold together.” Arndt and Gingrich first give “bring together, unite, collect,” as transitive meanings. As intransitive, perfect active meanings, they give “be composed ... continue, endure.” The verb *consist* does not seem suitable, for it suggests that Christ is the stuff out of which the universe was formed. The other three versions have a very good translation. Edging slightly from strictness to interpretation, one might say, ‘By him the universe was organized.’

In any case the subject is Christ, emphasized by the *autos* (he himself) with which the verse begins.

The NAS seems to agree, for it translates verse 10 as, “it was fitting for Him;” and this *Him*, with a capital H, is a repetition of the *Him* in verse 9, who is clearly Christ. The RSV, however, is strangely ambiguous. Hebrews interprets Psalm 8 as referring to Christ, but the RSV translates verse 8 as, “In putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside of his

control.” If the second *his* has the same reference as the first *his*, it would seem that man, as a human being, controls the motions of the stars and the valence of the elements. The *he* in verse 10 might refer to Christ, as in the KJ, but it does not clearly do so.

But verse eleven supports the reference to Christ. The second clause there says, “he is not ashamed to call them brethren.” Now, Scripture allows us to be called children or even sons of God, for God is our Father; but nowhere does the Bible call us brethren of the Father. It is Christ who can, and who in verse 11 does, unashamedly call us brethren. And surely verses 13 and 14 can only refer to Christ.

To this point the argument has favored interpreting verse 10 as referring to Christ. But not all agree. The NIV reads, “It was fitting that God for whom” etc. Now the word *God* is plainly a mistranslation. Neither Tischendorf nor Aland cite a single manuscript with such a reading. But though it is a mistranslation, it may be a good interpretation. The New American Bible and the Jerusalem Bible, both Roman Catholic translations, and the unrestrained imaginative version of *Good News for Modern Man*, all have *God*. As just said, there is no manuscript evidence to support, much less to justify, this alteration of the text.

With reference to interpretation, John Owen, who extends his explanation of the verse for some thirty pages, favors it, but without giving the least exegesis to defend it. Rienecker (*A Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament*, Vol. II, p. 323), who is not merely a crutch to limping students, remarks that *agagonta* (leading) “could, refer to Christ who leads sons into glory, or it could refer to the subject of the infinitive [*teleiōsai*: to complete or perfect] i.e. God the Father who leads sons into glory.” But he also adds that “it could, be explained as a proleptic aorist which envisages the work of Christ.” The word *archēgon* (leader, hero, commander) must refer to Christ because he leads many sons to glory through suffering.

But now the difficulty becomes mere apparent. This leader or captain of our salvation is perfected through suffering. But who perfects him? Does he perfect himself or does the Father perfect him? The idea that Christ perfects himself, though possible is strange. We would have to say, ‘it was proper for Christ to perfect the captain of our salvation.’ Queer as this is, it is still more strange to say, ‘it was proper for the Father, leading many sons to glory, to perfect the captain’, when *leading* and *captain* are in apposition to ‘him who created all things.’ This would make the Father perfect himself through suffering!

The situation seems to reduce to two possibilities. One can awkwardly, very awkwardly, insert an unclear and unconnected reference to the Father in a strongly Christological paragraph; or one can awkwardly say that Christ perfected himself. If this disjunction is the case, one must prefer the less awkward interpretation.

AN APPENDIX

The title of this small booklet is *Desultory New Testament Curiosities*. The Old Testament was not mentioned because the type of curiosities envisaged is rare in the Old Testament. It has its share of difficulties, and it was vigorously attacked from the eighteenth century onward before the New Testament came under fire. However even the Old Testament has some of the desultory variety, and this is the place to sample them.

The first verse in the Bible that is commonly misunderstood is Gen. 4:9. Of course secular scientists and others who impugn the Bible's veracity deny the account of creation. They invent contradictions between Genesis 1 and Genesis 2. They hold to one or another evolutionary theory that makes man a natural descendant of a lower animal form. But all this is more a denial of the truth of the Bible than a misinterpretation of what it says. The present list has to do with more or less common mistakes in understanding what the Bible actually says. The first of these is Gen. 4:9.

Cain had just murdered Abel because of jealousy. Abel's sacrifice, prepared as God had commanded, was accepted; Cain's, not so prepared, was rejected. God then confronted Cain: "Then the Lord said to Cain, 'Where is Abel, your brother?' And he said, 'I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?'"

Many people think that Cain was his brother's keeper and that he wished to deny his obligation. Of course, Cain told a lie when he said, "I do not know." But the point at issue is whether Cain was or was not his brother's keeper, and whether in consequence we are our brothers' or neighbors' keeper.

This view credits Cain with too little intelligence. Anyone of average mentality, caught in such a situation, wants to ask a question that he knows will receive an answer that will help him out of his embarrassment. Cain asked God, "Am I my brother's keeper?" because he knew that God would have to answer, 'No, you are not.' Then Cain hoped to profit by this admission.

This common device often works among human beings. The culprit can frequently throw his accuser off the track. But of course Cain could not trick God by such an irrelevancy. It was not a question of anyone's being another's keeper. It was a question of anyone's being another's murderer.

In conjunction with this event there is another that attracts the attention of unbelievers and sometimes puzzles Christians. Cain recognized that he would be a fugitive and a vagabond, and "it will happen that anyone who finds me will kill me." But, remarks the non-Christian critic,

the Biblical account allows for no such avenger. Cain and Abel were the only two, other than their parents. This attempt to discredit the Bible is too near-sighted. True, at the moment there was no one to kill Cain. But Gen. 5:3, 4 tells us that Adam and Eve had other children and grandchildren. One of these might well have avenged Abel.

Incidentally Cain's sin presupposes that God gave the sixth commandment to our first parents and instituted blood sacrifices long before Moses wrote Leviticus. To the same point Gen. 7:2 assumes that Noah already knew the food laws that remain even today among the orthodox Jews.

In Judges 6:12 the angel of the Lord comes to Gideon and sends him to defeat the Midianites. On several occasions I have heard ludicrous misinterpretations of Gideon's conversation with God. The Midianites were so powerful that Gideon has doubts as to his abilities. First, his family was the weakest in Manasseh, and he was the least in his father's house. Therefore Gideon requests a sign that the message is really from the Lord, that it was really God, not his imagination nor a deceiving spirit that had spoken to him. This is hardly reprehensible, since later in the Bible we are told that Satan can deceive even the elect. One sign given was that God sent fire upon a sacrifice that Gideon had prepared. After some intermediate events, which modern Christians hardly remember, Gideon asks for another sign before he attacks the great Midianite army. He will put a fleece of wool on the ground overnight, and if in the morning there is dew on the fleece, while the earth around it is dry, "then shall I know that thou wilt save Israel by my hand as thou hast said." Well, in the morning the fleece was sopping wet. But Gideon was not completely satisfied. "Let me test this just once more ... let the fleece be dry and the ground wet with dew ... And God did so that night" (6:40).

Now there was a Christian professor in a Christian college. He entered into conversation with the president of another college, relative to finding another position. After preliminary discussions, the time came for the president to make a definite offer and for the professor to accept or decline. The professor and his wife decided to "put out the fleece," he told me. Putting out the fleece consisted in accepting the offer if it should be a certain sum higher than his salary at the time. On more than one ground, dripping wet or dusty dry, this is definitely a misapplication of Gideon's procedure.

Proverbs 29:18 is frequently misunderstood: "Where there is no vision, the people perish." A seminary professor I know, when a student in college, was advised to major in

sociology on the ground that “where there is no vision the people perish.” Said the professor, ‘You need a vision. Look out on life. Choose an ideal. Meet the needs of the time.’ This idea was pictorially represented in a famous painting by Bruegel. There are five blind men, holding hands in a line, led by one of their own. The leader has already tumbled into a ditch, the second is just beginning to tumble, and it is clear that the other three soon will. Of course neither Bruegel nor those who look at the painting interpret the verse in Proverbs literally. The vision in the verse is not physical blindness: it is something that can affect a whole society. So the sociology professor urged the student not to be blind to the need for a better society.

Now, while the word *vision* is a legitimate translation of the Hebrew term, the New King James version has changed it into something less likely to be misunderstood. This new version is not an exegetical interpretation: it is just as lexicographically correct as the KJ. It says, “Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint.” I am not sure that the last verb there is any improvement, but the first change is supported by a comparison with other verses. Isaiah 1:1, Jer. 14:14, Dan. 10:14, Obad. 1:1, and Hab. 2:2 all show that this word means a revelation from God.

Surely Isa. 45:7 is the most frequently misunderstood verse in all the Old Testament, paralleled only by Rom. 9:11-13 in the New. The KJ reads, “I make peace and create evil.” The RSV says, “I make weal and create woe,” Incidentally it is strange that those who dislike the KJ because of some archaic wording here use the word *weal*, unfamiliar as it is in contemporary speech. In the NAS the verse is, “Causing well-being and creating calamity,” This could mean that God causes inflation and depressions in the business cycle. Well, he does; but this is not what the verse means. Instead of *well-being*, *peace* is the better term because the context concerns peace with God. There is no reference to economics: the skies do not pour down gold and silver, but righteousness. The earth does not produce crops, but salvation. Though Cyrus was to be a political ruler, the theme is not national independence. Verses 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, ff., show clearly that the peace envisioned is peace with God.

Now, if the peace of the passage is righteousness and favor with God, the “evil” cannot be mere calamity, such as drought and hurricanes, but it must be the enmity between God and man. The locus of the chapter is sin and salvation, not pestilence and poverty.

Such also is the meaning of the word pretty much throughout the Old Testament. The Hebrew word is *Ra*. It occurs more than a hundred times in the Old Testament. In addition to the

translation *evil*, various verses use *adversity*, *affliction*, *harm*, *sorrow*, and *trouble*. What kind of harm or trouble there is, must be determined by the context. Since it would be difficult to separate all these kinds into sharply distinct varieties, it is better to canvass the material from Genesis to Malachi, rather than to attempt a logical division. One advantage of this basically chronological procedure is that the account cannot be charged with any premature bias in the exposition. Of course someone might charge bias because not all the numerous instances are listed; but few people want to be so deluged with information.

The first occurrences of the term *ra* in the Old Testament are Gen. 2:9, 17. Both verses speak of “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” This does not mean that the tree was not good to eat, as if it were chemically poisonous. Eve clearly saw that the fruit was “good for food” (3:6). The remainder of the account shows that the evil consisted in an act of rebellion against God. The evil was sin. Genesis 3:25 as well as 3:6 supports this point.

Genesis 6:5 says that “God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” In this verse the word *wickedness*, and the word *evil*, are both *ra*. How could anyone dare to reduce this to an ambiguous “calamity”? The same remark applies equally to Gen. 8:21. The word means sin.

Not all the cases of *ra* mean sin. Genesis 19:19 seems to refer to an attack by a wild beast, a fatal fall from a precipice, or possibly death by thirst. One must determine the meaning of doubtful cases by the context and as a background by the more common usage.

In Gen. 37:2 Joseph brought to his father “their evil report.” Just what this evil was is not clear. There is no mention of any calamity that had befallen the brothers. What follows speaks of jealousy, not physical injuries. It is just possible that Joseph brought to his father news of some matters of which his father’s wives had complained about.

Genesis 37:20 mentions an *evil* beast; and this is repeated in 37:33.

By the time of Gen. 44:4 Joseph had become secretary of agriculture, if not prime minister, of Egypt. According to his plan he accuses his brethren of having “rewarded evil for good.” This is an accusation of theft. The evil was a sin. The evil in Gen. 44:34 is death or at least great depression. In 47:9 Jacob addresses Pharaoh: “few and evil have the days of the years of my life been.” Jacob was of course no young man. Instead of his days having been few, he was 130 years old. I take it therefore that the term *evil*, like the rest, is part of the etiquette required of a subject who has to address a high ruler.

Shortly after, in Gen. 48:16, Jacob is on his death bed, giving his blessings to Joseph's two sons. He says, "The Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads." In his lifetime Jacob had faced some physical dangers, but here he speaks of redemption. Now, one does not usually speak of being redeemed from having been defrauded in one's first marriage; and although he was 'saved' from starvation, we do not say he was redeemed from starvation. Jacob, rather, is talking about the "God before whom my fathers, Abraham and Isaac, did walk." The subject matter is God's covenant with Abraham (15, 16) and God's plan to bring that family into the promised land four hundred years later.

"And when Joseph's brethren saw that their father was dead, they said, Joseph will peradventure hate us and certainly requite us all the evil which we did to him." In a loose sense Joseph's being imprisoned by Potiphar was a calamity; but the anticipated hatred had to do with the sins of the brothers. Evil here means sin. Indeed, verse 17 speaks of trespass and sin, then of evil, and finally trespass again. So also verse 20.

Since the misrepresentation of Isa. 45:7 derives chiefly from a non-scriptural presupposition relative to what God can and cannot do, rather than from textual exegesis, a discussion in order to be thorough would have to examine all the verses. The reader is invited and urged to do so. But so long as this discussion lists some of the verses which non-reformed theologians use in their avoidance of the full Biblical position, it may conveniently omit all of Exodus, include some of Numbers and Deuteronomy, and skip over many others. A careful student can easily find the omitted instances of *ra*.

The term occurs in Num. 11:15; in 14:27, 35, 37; in 20:5 and 32:13. In the first of these references the KJ translates it *wretchedness*. Moses contrasts his wretchedness with "favor in thy sight." This wretchedness may include the physical and mental burdens of welding a horde of slaves into an organized society. But the favor he asks is to be cleansed from his sins and that God may kill him forthwith and receive him into heaven.

Numbers 14:27 refers to the Israelites as an evil congregation. It is God who calls them evil, and the evil is their murmurings against God. That is, the evil was sin. The same idea recurs explicitly in 14:35; implicitly in 14:37, for the evil report was a denial of God's omnipotence. The evil in Num. 20:5 includes thirst and starvation, which would indeed be a calamity; but it is also the background of sin and rebellion from verses 2, 3, and 4. As clearly as anywhere *evil* means sin in Num. 32:13. It says that "the Lord's anger was kindled against Israel ... that had

done evil in the sight of the Lord.” Now, if only calamity were meant, the Lord might be expected to show compassion rather than anger. No, the *ra* was sin against God. Sin and anger are in the next verse also. So much for Numbers.

Unless I have missed one or two, Deuteronomy has sixteen instances of the word *ra*. Chapter one, verses 35 and 39, very obviously speak of sin, for God was “wroth” and “angry,” though the little children were too young to distinguish good from evil. In 4:25 *ra* refers to idolatry, which God will punish in his anger. Punishment is no doubt a calamity, but the evil was sin. The evil diseases of Egypt in 7:15 are also calamities; whether these diseases were the result of sin or only of natural causes, the text does not say. The evil of 13:5 is bad theology. Capital punishment is the penalty. Similarly the evil of 17:7 and 12 is a transgression of the covenant, particularly idolatry, and “that man shall die and thou shalt put away the evil from Israel.” The evil of 19:19, 20 is perjury. Rebellion against parents, gluttony and drunkenness are the evils of 21:21. In the next chapter, 22:14, the sin is the defamation of a wife’s character, continued in verse 19. Verse 22 concerns adultery; and verse 24 distinguishes between rape when people are near enough to hear a cry for help, and rape where no cry could be heard. Chapter 24:7 is a case of theft.

At this point it may be well to return to Genesis and quote a few verses where *ra* is translated otherwise than by the English evil. Genesis 31:52 has *harm*. It is part of a treaty between Laban and Jacob. The harms seem to be mostly a theft of sheep and an insult to Laban’s daughters as Jacob’s wives. At least theft is a sin. The evil in Gen. 44:29, called sorrow, would be Jacob’s death, if Benjamin were harmed as Joseph was supposed to have been. The *harm* of Num. 35:23 is an unintentional homicide, that is, a fatal accident. In such a case the agent did *not* seek the victim’s harm. The harm in II Kings 4:41 is accidental poisoning. No sin seems to be involved. This is one of the few verses where *ra* seems totally separated from sin. In Prov. 3:29 *ra* is translated *evil* and in 3:30 it is *harm*. The *evil* is clearly some sin in 3:29, and *harm* is only a bit less clear in 3:30.

Naturally the Psalms often mention *ra*. Psalm 10:6 tells us that “The wicked ... hath said in his heart ... I shall never be in *adversity*.” This sound like calamity, and maybe the wicked man thought so; but the context includes covetousness, irreligion, cursing, deceit, and fraud. Psalm 27:5 reads, “In the time of *trouble* he shall hide me in his pavilion.” Now, the trouble seems to be injuries inflicted by enemies, and verse 12 mentions cruelty; but the safety besought

from God is at least mainly spiritual. Palm 94:13 is less clear: “Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest . . . that thou mayest give him rest from the days of *adversity* until the pit be digged for the wicked.” One could suppose that the adversity is purely physical, or with mental apprehension, but the other side of the coin is wickedness and iniquity. Psalm 107:26, 39 have the business entrepreneur lifted up on the sea to heaven and then dropped down to the depths: “their soul is melted because of *trouble*.” This is a good verse to use, if one wishes to eradicate sin from *ra*. But perhaps the entrepreneur had forgotten God because it is in their trouble that they cry out to him for help. In 107:39 the word is *affliction*. Just what this is the verse does not say.

Doubtless those who would rid *ra* of sin would quote Eccl. 7:14. *Adversity* is contrasted with prosperity. Even so, God sends the adversity. We now skip to Jer. 2:27, 48:16, and 51:2. In the first of these references *ra* is translated *trouble*; but the subject matter is idolatry. The second reference says, “The calamity [not *ra*] of Moab is near to come, and his *affliction* hasteth fast.” The affliction, I take it, is punishment for sin. Of course those who disagree with my main contention will point out that punishment is not sin. The background, however, is. Jeremiah 51:1, 2 say, “Thus saith the Lord, Behold I will raise up against Babylon . . . and shall empty her land, for in the day of *trouble* they shall be against her round about.” This could be a reference to Belshazzar’s feast, where he praised the gods of gold and silver, as he used the sacred vessels from the temple in Jerusalem, while the army of Darius the Mede was surrounding the city.

Lamentations 1:21, in English, uses the word *trouble*. But note that in the previous verse “my bowels are troubled, mine heart is turned within me, for I have grievously rebelled.” Ordinarily we do not think of Jeremiah as having grievously rebelled against God. Presumably Jeremiah is identifying himself with and speaking for Jerusalem.

It is true that some of the verses quoted, and others not quoted, can by a sharp separation be confined to the penalty for sin so as to purge the term *ra* from any sinful connotation. This, I believe, is an excessive separation. But let such verses be so. That *ra* frequently means sin is indisputable. In Zeph. 3:15 the *evil* which they shall not see any more is identified with speaking lies and a deceitful tongue; its opposite is, not doing iniquity, rejoicing with all their heart, and absence of fear because the Lord is in the midst of thee.

For a final verse, not particularly climactic, Zech. 1:15 says that God is “sore displeased with the heathen,” and the rest of the verse, though puzzling, seems to say that God’s slight

displeasure at first was increased as the heathen “helped forward the affliction.” The NEB translates it, “For I was a little angry, and they helped, but with evil intent.” The RSV, which I never trust, has “they furthered the disaster.” So does the NAS. Though the verse may be puzzling, it seems clear enough to me that the heathen increased their sinning. One could hardly say that God’s displeasure increased simply because their calamities increased. Indeed, God would be pleased by such an increase.

This list of quotations is far from exhaustive, however exhausting. One must note, however, that the list does not exclude verses which are seemingly inconsistent with the conclusion to be drawn. In any case, concordances are at the disposal of nearly every reader, where he can search the Scriptures and see whether these things are so. One good source is the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* by Harris, Archer, and Waltke, Vol. II, p. 854, #2191, a, b, c. Now we can return to the misunderstood verse with which we started, and draw our conclusion.

The verse says, “I make peace and create evil.” Since there are a few verses where *ra* seems not to include sin, one cannot assert right off that here it means sin. If statistics alone could settle the problem, one would have to decide for sin. But many theologians are deeply predetermined to deny sin and favor physical calamities, such as earthquakes and war. But in war, if not in earthquakes, one side and sometimes both sides have committed sins.

The Scofield Bible makes a desperate attempt to rule out sin by a device which I would call deceptive. Scofield’s note on Isa. 45:7 is, “Heb. *ra*, translated ‘sorrow,’ ‘wretchedness,’ ‘adversity,’ ‘afflictions,’ ‘calamities,’ but never translated *sin*. God created evil only in the sense that He made sorrows, wretchedness, etc., to be the sure fruits of sin.”

The first point, but not the most important, is the submerged logical fallacy that if *ra* is never *translated* sin it cannot *mean* sin. But beyond this, the phrase “never translated sin” is interesting, very interesting, precisely because it is true. To make such a statement responsibly, one must have examined every one of its instances in the Old Testament. There are over one hundred instances before one finishes I Kings. There is easily another hundred before the end of Proverbs – and these figures do not include those cases where *ra* is translated sorrow, adversity, or calamity. Yet note that Scofield’s statement is all inclusive: “God created evil *only* in the sense that He made sorrow ... to be the sure fruits of sin.”

No man of even ordinary intelligence can fail to see that in most cases *ra* means sin. True enough, *ra* is never *translated* sin. This true, but utterly irrelevant, observation gives the impression that *ra* never *means* sin. But of course Scofield did not dare say so, for he knew it was not true.

It is difficult to compose a suitable concluding paragraph for this study. With respect to the desultory curiosities the obvious recommendation is that everyone should read the Bible with thought and care. With respect to the final item, one can lament the churches' decline, initiated by the non-romanist but semi-pelagian James Arminius. The freedom of the will, which Luther had so vigorously denounced in his *Bondage of the Will* against Erasmus, was substituted for the sovereignty of God. God's inability to determine man's will puts history beyond his control. That Christ was "slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8) becomes impossible because Judas might have willed otherwise. The Arminian scheme has no place for divine sovereignty. Nor can God be omniscient, for if a man's action can be foreknown long before the man is born, there must be a determining factor that makes it impossible for the man to choose otherwise. That factor is God. Sola Scriptura requires Deo Soli Gloria.⁴

⁴For further study one should read the great Baptist theologian's work, John Gill, *The Cause of God and Truth* (passim); the great Anglican, author of Rock of Ages, Augustus Toplady, *Complete Works* (1869); *The Doctrine of Absolute Predestination* (pp. 687 ff.), *Christian and Philosophical Necessity Asserted* (pp. 784 ff.) et al; William Cunningham, *The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation*, (London, 1862), *Calvinism and the Doctrine of Philosophical Necessity* (pp. 471 ff.) et al; Benjamin B. Warfield, *Biblical Doctrines*, *Predestination* (pp. 3 ff.), and *Selected Shorter Writings*, *Some Thoughts on Predestination*, pp. 103 ff., et al; and G.H. Clark, *Predestination in the Old Testament* (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1978.)