

To my good neighbor, friend and brother in Christ, Lee:

25 September 95

In the past, especially in the 70s and early 80s, I read Miles Stanford essays with interest and inspiration. Thanks for letting me read his *Open Letter* to Dr. Howard G. Hendricks*. There was enough with which to agree and not agree. I don't think I need to go through the *Letter* point by point, but I would like to express some thoughts regarding what I believe to be a general principle for humans: *none of us has complete understanding of biblical truth*. This should help us have a more humble opinion of ourselves and, as a consequence, a higher opinion of others. I think that, as our spiritual seniority swells, so should our openness toward and tolerance of others. As we grow older, shouldn't we become mellow, if not wiser?

None of us – as individuals or groups – has a corner on Truth, exclusive enlightenment, the religiously-right interpretation. (And if we think we do, it just proves our self-deception.) Apostle Paul had much more direct, divine revelation of Truth and more than a normal amount of spiritual insight. But even he stated: *"For we know in part...we see through a glass, darkly..."* (1 Cor. 13:9,12).

Except for the obvious, simple, clear basics (for example, the preaching/receiving of the Gospel and the most elementary of doctrines), we need to stay teachable all the days of our earthly lives. None of us will ever arrive (while still in this body) at a complete understanding, not only regarding dispensationalism, but also regarding many other controversial, debatable things. So, all of us are partly right, partly wrong. *God can live with that. Can I?*

Again. None of us has all the truth. Thank God, *He* sees to that! He has made sure Truth is safely shared with His children among many denominations. How sad when one Christian group thinks only it correctly divides and interprets God's Truth.

Some practices in certain churches may not be to *my* liking, may not please *me*. But this does not make them wrong, bad. People are not worshipping *me*. They are worshipping God, and his criteria are different from mine. He is lot more understanding, tolerant and receptive than I am. He accepts all worship that is *"...in spirit and in truth."* If I am uncomfortable in a given church, I can always find another church where I will feel more at home. If, for me, personal comfort and convenience is paramount in faith and practice, I will experience minimal stretching and growing. And anyway, there can be no absolutely perfect situation as long as I am part of a given scene.

Question. If ten Christian psychologists, Bible teachers and theologians disagree with each other (have ten different interpretations of one text or truth), how many of them are wrong? Of course, it would be easy enough to say at least 90 percent of them have to be wrong. But it would probably be more accurate to say that all of them have some of the truth. Even Satan includes a good dose of truth in his teachings. Of course, he knows what's what. The same can't always be said about us.

Do we want the Lord to be as hard on us as we are on members of Christ's Body, members who happen to see things differently? This is not a matter of biblical inerrancy or orthodoxy. It is simply *my* concepts and definitions versus *yours*. It is not a matter of compromise but of comprehension – yours versus mine. It is the ever-present raw, carnal characteristic that deems him wrong who dares to disagree with me, with my viewpoint, with my interpretation.

I am *not* God's exclusive opinion representative. I am *not* His sole spokesman. I am *not* His Chief-of-Staff. He has not spoken to/through me only. Just because a certain segment of Christians says something is so, doesn't necessarily make it so.

There is precious little we "know" for sure. But, even "knowing" is but a part of a greater whole. (Religious knowledge, by itself, can be detrimental – to oneself and to others.) There is the "knowing" and the "being." Satan knows biblical theology and God's Timetable far better than I do. But, he's going to an eternal hell and I'm going to an everlasting heaven. Big, important, difference. We Christians shouldn't be at each other's throats because of differing personal preferences and positions. If we think we're right, we can afford to be kind. We should be working arm-in-arm fulfilling Christ's directive: "*Go... preach the Gospel...*"

"Master," said John, *"we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we tried to stop him, because he is not one of us [my emphasis]."* *"Do not stop him,"* Jesus said, *"for whoever is not against you is for you."* (Luke 9:49, 50)

I like Apostle Paul's attitude when he says: *"What then? Notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein rejoice..."* (Phil. 1:18).

Yours, right or wrong,
Paul

**Open letter*, a letter written as to a specific person, often in attack, criticism, etc., but published in a newspaper or magazine for everyone to read. New (Webster) World Dictionary, Simon & Schuster, 1980.

Addendum

The Book of Job is an excellent study of fallen human nature: of self-justification, of self-pride and self-righteousness, of self-importance, of the frailty of friendship, of the superficiality and self-centeredness of passion, compassion, and care & comfort giving.

Three of Job's friends – Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar – *"...had made an appointment together to come to mourn with him and to comfort him"* (2:11). (By the way, this turns out to be a funny line in light of what follows in the biblical narrative.)

Each of Job's friends said what he thought was correct, right, true. And God permitted them to say anything and everything they wanted to verbalize to Job. Job, in turn, expressed himself to his friends and, indirectly, to God. God, quietly and patiently, allowed him to do so. But the words of Job and his three friends made a fourth man, a younger man, mad. His name was Elihu. At first, he spoke of simply wanting to express his opinion (32:6,10). But, before long, he was saying things like: *"...my lips shall utter knowledge clearly"* (33:3); *"...I will shew thee that I have yet to speak on God's behalf..."* [even though he admitted he didn't know God – 36:26] *...For truly my words shall not be false"* (36:2,4).

Finally, God addresses *Job*: *"Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?"* (38:2) In the end, Job appropriately responds to God with these words:

"...therefore have I uttered that I understood not...I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes" (42:3,6). (A good move for many of today's Bible teachers and theologians who also don't know what they're talking about.)

To Eliphaz God said: *"My wrath is kindled against thee, and against thy two friends: for ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as my servant Job hath."*

Mystery. What did God say and do to Elihu, the young man (32:6) who made brash claims about himself and claimed to speak for God? I think God graciously chose to overlook his youthful zeal-without-knowledge. Time and experience would be his teachers. He had potential.

Anyway, none of these men, including Job, could speak on God's behalf, could speak clearly about Him. Job's *accuracy average* just happened to be higher than that of his comfortless comforters, self-appointed accusers and self-proclaimed instructors.

All of them dished out a mixture of truth and error. In the Year of our Lord, 1995, things haven't changed that much. And God kindly puts up with our well-meant verbiage. If it's not too damaging, He probably smiles; if it's actually dangerous, He probably grieves. One thing He will *not* do is write us off; He will not give up on us; He will not separate Himself from us. Right or wrong, we remain His children. That is a great consolation, especially when we fail to be Christlike in attitude and action. ◇◇