

Foolish Judges or Negligent Christians?

By Paul R. Blake

“He... makes fools of the judges” (Job 12:17). “Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; Who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!” (Isa. 5:20).

Some years ago, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that a fifth grade teacher violated the First Amendment's so called “Separation of Church and State” by placing a Bible on his school desk. This “doctrine of separation” is attributed to Thomas Jefferson. However, it was Thomas Jefferson who, while President, asked that the Bible be used in public schools for their reading curriculum. Jefferson said, “I have always said, and always will say, that the studious perusal of the sacred volume will make us better citizens.” Isn't it ironic that in the name of Jefferson the very thing he advocated is now being struck down by our judicial system? While Christians must respect the offices of civil leaders, it is not un-Christian to acknowledge that God calls them fools when they lead in this manner.

Wait just a moment! Before feeling outraged by the assaults on religious liberty and becoming somewhat self-righteous, consider... you have the freedom to pick up your own Bible and read and study it as often and as much as you like in your home. To what extent are you exercising that liberty? Here is another irony: some of those who most loudly protest restrictions on public prayer and Bible study, pray and study very little at home.

I am convinced that a Christian will accomplish far more by transforming his life with prayer and Bible study and thus salting the earth with his Christian influence, than he will by fighting city hall. Has there ever been a time in history when true Christianity was in full favor and freedom under any civil government? Even minor victories and freedoms are short-lived. At the same time, there has never been a time (nor will there ever be) when civil government had the power to interfere with the relationship between the individual Christian and God. *“For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:38).*

Cultivate the practice of prayer and Bible study in private, and you will be more credible when you advocate for it in public. Can you handle another irony? How tragic it will be for those who publicly protest Perdition-bound Judges and Presidents, only to join them in Hell in the hereafter because they neglected prayer and Bible study in private.

Thinking About Heaven

By Kent Heaton

Can you imagine a city so large that it encompasses two and a quarter million square miles? The northern boundary is 1500 miles as well as the east, west and southern boundaries. Not only is the size of the city massive in length and width – the height of the city is also 1500 miles. Is it possible to wrap the mind around a city of this size? Imagine further this grand city being made of pure gold and the walls that stretch for 1500 miles in either direction are made of jasper. The foundation of the city is made up of a myriad of jewels with twelve gates made of one pearl each. All the streets are paved with gold but have no street lights adorning the curb. This incredible city with its gates standing open eternally is brightened by the glory of God. If we can imagine a city so unbelievable and majestic then we have shared in the tendrils of *“the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God” (Rev. 21:10).*

John's account of the *“new heaven and a new earth” (Rev. 21:1)* burst from the pages of holy writ. The Revelation captures the imagination from beginning to end as the war between righteousness and evil plays out on the parchment of John's book. The trumpet of victory

sounds in the latter part with the triumph of the *"King of Kings and Lord of Lords"* (Rev. 19:16) when all that opposes God is banished in the *"second death"* (Rev. 20:11-15). Rising with wonder is the promise of the city long ago given by God to His saints in illusionary words as Divine seeks to instill in mortality a view of Heaven.

The terms of length and height and materials are only figurative as God seeks to instill an image of Heaven in the feeble mind of man that is beyond anything man could ever dream of. We are not to understand the fullness of its beauty. It is beyond man's greatest imagination to come to terms with a city of such vast space and splendor; and that is the point of the illustration. If man could ever understand fully the blessing of eternal life then man has mastered the knowledge of God. Yet the Lord keeps man far from the level of knowledge that would give him hope and the longing for something beyond his power.

The Almighty wants his people to think about Heaven and when thinking about Heaven to consider how great God is and how blessed man is to be allowed to dwell in such a place. This is not something built by man; this is built by God. The Hebrew writer alludes to this promise in Hebrews 11:13-16... *"These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them."*

If a man lives to be one thousand years old he will only grasp the hem of the garment understanding what Heaven is like. What a wonderful life to live and think about something so beautiful and so grand. David said, *"I will meditate on the glorious splendor of Your majesty, and on Your wondrous works"* (Psalms 145:5). Think!

Ruthlessly Removed

"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit" (John 15:1-2).

In pruning a vine, two principles are generally observed: first, all dead wood must be ruthlessly removed; and second, the live wood must be cut back drastically. Dead wood harbors insects and disease and may cause the vine to rot, to say nothing of being unproductive and unsightly. Live wood must be trimmed back in order to prevent the kind of growth where the life of the vine goes into the wood rather than into fruit. The vineyards in the early spring look like a collection of barren stumps; but in the fall they are filled with rich, ripe grapes. As the farmer uses the pruning knife on his vines, so God cuts dead wood out from among our lives, and often cuts back the living wood so far that His method seems cruel. Nevertheless, from those who have suffered the most there often comes the greatest fruitfulness.

I think we can add a fourth truth to the three great truths in trials of 1Cor. 10:13... That there has no trial taken you, but such as can make you a better person for having endured it. *"But though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day"* (2Cor. 4:16).