

THE PLEASANT VIEW PLUMB LINE

"...then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel..." (Amos 7:8)

USER FRIENDLY

"User-friendly," now there is a familiar and an accommodating phrase. The technology of the day is often marketed as "user-friendly." Most "user-friendly" things are just that—if you understand how to use them.

All of us as consumers are most content when things are "user-friendly." And, in this day of accommodating the consumer, the genius of the marketing experts is readily employed. Admittedly, the marketing of the various products is an essential part of doing business. Yet, is it not more than a little amazing the number of things we are urged to buy that we do not need? How much "user-friendly" stuff have you purchased that is now collecting dust in your attic or garage or rented storage unit? Possibly we ought to pool our "user-friendly" stuff and have a "user-friendly" yard sale.

But, let's change direction. Have you ever thought of God, or the things of God, as "user-friendly?" It may surprise you, but many people are seeking a God that is "user-friendly."

Is God the Sovereign of the universe, or does He exist to cater to our human wants and demands? Does God exist to respond to our personal needs and to accommodate our religious preferences? Listen to the conversations of the religious for a few moments, or to the religious leaders around about. The conversations and the pronouncements being made present God as though he were the proprietor of the big store up in heaven and exists to cater to His customers. Religious is big business, but righteousness is not. Excitement is in, reverence is out; self-fulfillment is in, self-denial is out. "Obedience to God" is out and learning how to use God to get what you want is in. Consider the programs that are man-centered and sensual, appealing to entertainment and excitement even in the local religious venues. In these venues, church is out, business is in. Celebrity is prominent, service is not! Numbers are in, conversions are out! Repentance, holiness, and commitment are seldom mentioned. Could the reason be that they are not very marketable—are not very "user-friendly?" Modern worship, or what is advertised as worship, is "user-friendly," with emphasis upon casual attitude, casual dress, and "personal enjoyment." "Try it, you will like it!" is the sales pitch. Self-esteem and self-improvement are slickly packaged and are hawked as hot commodities. In the place of commitment to the word of God, commitment is to that which keeps the customers happy. Religious entrepreneurs are cunning and crafty salesmen. They know that the religious consumer demands a "user-friendly god," a god they can use and enjoy, and so the entrepreneurs know they can sell their product—only if and as they meet the customer's demands.

Over against all of this stands that which belongs to God. Jesus is still King of kings, and Lord of lords. His word is still final. His will and purpose are yet high and holy; demanding and humbling. His words are not those being voiced by the religious entrepreneurs, nor do His words accommodate religious consumers. God's will is final, His glory is essential. In and through Christ, God continues to call all mankind to faith and repentance, to genuine reverence and obedience. God continues to lift up the humble and He continues to resist the proud.

How is it that many will posture as though they long to know and honor God, then turn away to follow the pied-pipers of false teaching and false religions, and fail to even consider that they have abandoned the will of God? Many not only resist the express will of God, they ridicule and reject it. They often reject God's will in subtle ways. An illustration: Many sincerely" embrace the message of salvation by "sincerity alone," (they teach it does not matter what one believes or practices so long as he is sincere). They do not even begin to concern themselves with the blatant assault this "nice sounding doctrine"

FROM LIFE TO LIFE: SALVATION'S STEPS

Text: _____

I. The Pit of _____

Notes:

II. The Steps of _____

Notes:

III. The Home of _____

Notes:

READ THE INSTRUCTIONS

I can vividly remember by first two-wheeler bicycle that my dad bought me when I was a boy. It was a red Huffy "Cheater Slick" with a banana seat. Now, when he bought the bike, he had a choice of buying a display model that was already assembled, or he could buy the "bike in a box" that he would have to assemble himself. We bought the bike in a box because it was five dollars cheaper.

So we took the bike home and spread all the parts out on the living room floor. To a little boy, it all looked so confusing. But one thing I knew...I knew where the hand grips went, so I popped them on the handlebar without reading the instructions. To my dismay, I later learned that I shouldn't have been so hasty and should have read the instructions, for the handlebar had to be threaded through a joint prior to putting on the hand grips. Uh-oh. Too late. The grips were on, and wouldn't come off, so one of the grips had to be cut off. Consequently, my red Huffy bike always had just one hand grip.

That lesson learned many years ago reminds me that life comes so much easier when we read the instructions. In fact, God left us an instruction book, the Bible. For instance, one of the things He tells us in the Bible is it is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35), and yet how many people do you know who are pursuing happiness apart from giving and selflessness? Friends, do yourself a favor and read the instructions before you make a mistake. God made you, and He knows best how you are to function. For best results, consult the owner's manual.

makes against the Lord Jesus, and against His gospel. If "sincerity alone" is all that is required, no Savior is needed, no Gospel is needed; the facts and commands of the Gospel are of no consequence, etc. Undeniably, many things that are desired by many religious shoppers (and are being offered by the religious entrepreneurs of the day) blatantly reject the revealed will of God. And, this rejection is of no real concern to them. How is it that the vast majority in the practice of their religious, give so little attention to the necessity of knowing God, doing His will, and living for Him? Could it be that God is too demanding and not "user-friendly?" Is it possible that the modern religionists could teach God a few things?

-Ronald Bryant

FORGIVE ME FOR KEEPING YOUR BIBLE

The train blew its whistle and wove its way along the winding rails of the hometown of a brother in Hungary. A communist customs agent came through checking all the baggage. The sack of Bibles sat at our brother's feet. By his side lay his own personal Bible with notes and sermon outlines. The customs agent looked at the sack first. He opened it and thumbed through the pages of the Bible and began to sail them out the window of the speeding train.

As if for spite, the agent looked down at the open, used (obviously personal) Bible of our brother, grabbed it, and sailed it out the window to parts unknown. For three years our brother bemoaned the fact that his good Bible with so many notes and sermons was no longer his constant companion. "I believe Romans 8:28, but, Lord, how can this work out for God?" he wondered.

One day he received his personal Bible through the mail. A letter enclosed read, "Dear Brother in Christ: Thank you, Thank you, for the use of your Bible. I found it by the railroad three years ago. I have kept it, read it, and studied it often. My family and I have written many Scriptures down on paper and many more in our hearts. We cannot thank you enough, for now maybe we can go to heaven...But brother, please forgive me for keeping your Bible so long. I thought that if I did not read it now, I might never again find a Bible to read.

"Of, Great God and Father of us all, forgive me for doubting," wept our Hungarian brother.

Would not it be wonderful if all could come to the Bible as if we found it for the first time? We could be simply "Christians" with a deep desire to go to heaven, to be with the saints of all the ages. Pick up your New Testament and read it again for the first time. That is, read it as if you had never read it before. Follow what it says—not what some man says it says. Do what it commands—not what some other book requires (II Timothy 3:16-17).

IN DEFENSE OF OUR CHILDREN

One of the great joys I have in my work as a preacher is the opportunity to interact with the young children all around us. When I look at them now as they sing, pray, or even as some get behind the pulpit and “play preacher,” there is a joy in knowing that, while now they may not fully comprehend what they are doing, their youthful zeal can as easily grow into a mature passion as they get older, thus signifying that the future of the church is bright. Looking at these children a number of characteristics come to mind such as energetic, happy, loving, and even sometimes mischievous. The greatest of traits exemplified by every young child, though, is their innocence. Adolescence is a time of learning and growth, and with this period of maturing comes a natural sense of innocence from sin; and the Bible makes this fact abundantly clear. Many in the world, however, look at children in a completely different way because rather than recognizing that God-given innocence, they are attributed with a sinful nature.

Between the years 1509 and 1564, in the midst of what has been called the “Protestant Reformation,” there lived a man by the name of John Calvin. Calvin’s background, like the other reformers, was in Catholicism; however, as he began to work his way out of Catholicism, rather than restoring the pure truth of New Testament Christianity, Calvin instead resurrected the teachings of a fourth century apostate by the name of Augustine. One of Augustine’s basic beliefs was that through Adam’s sin in Eden a “sinful nature” is hereditarily passed on to all men. When Calvin began to revisit Augustine’s teachings it was truly nothing more than a new robe on an old error. In his Institutes of the Christian Religion, speaking of Adam’s sin, Calvin said it this way:

“Therefore, when the Divine image in him was obliterated, and he was punished with the loss of wisdom, strength, sanctity, truth, and righteousness, with which he had been adorned, but which were succeeded by the dreadful pests of ignorance, impotence, impurity, vanity, and iniquity, **he suffered not alone, but involved all his posterity with him, and plunged them into the same miseries.** This is that **hereditary corruption** which the fathers called *original sin*; meaning by sin, the depravation of a nature previously good and pure; on which subject they had much contention, nothing being more remote from natural reason, **than that all should be criminated on account of the guilt of one, and thus his sin become common...**” (bold emphasis mine, AJB).

What then is the basic tenet of Calvin’s teaching now known by the term “total hereditary depravity?” Basically his hypothesis is that because Adam sinned and received a consequence for his sin, that every human being is born with their soul bearing his guilt. According to Calvin, and those who accept and advance his error, when you look into the eyes of a child, instead of seeing innocence, you see a soul depraved in sin, wholly given to evil.

In defense of our children, though, what does the Bible say about such a ridiculous notion? First, from the law itself, Moses recorded that: “*The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin*” (Deuteronomy 24:16). With great force does God declare that every human being shall be held accountable only for their own individual actions, and not the actions of ancestors nor offspring. Therefore, first from the law of Moses is Calvin’s blunder defeated and the innocence of our children is defended.

Second, from the prophets, Ezekiel revealed that:

“Yet say ye, Why? Doth not the son bear the iniquity of the father? When the son hath done that which is lawful and right, and hath kept all my statutes, and hath done them, he shall surely live. The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him” (Ezekiel 18:9-20).

Spiritual death is affirmed to be endured only by the soul that sins, not from the soul of a child whose ancestry sinned. And then Ezekiel boldly declared that **the son will not bear the father’s iniquity**. As one has said, that statement is “ungetaroundable” when it comes to proving the innocence of our children. Thus, second, from the prophets is Calvin’s blunder defeated and the innocence of our children is defended.

Then, third, from Christ Himself do we have a clear statement of denial on behalf of this error. On one occasion, Christ took a little child unto Himself in the presence of His disciples to make a point. “*And he said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven*” (Matthew 18:3). How is it that we become as little children? By kindling a “sinful nature?” Such is foolishness. Rather Christ is saying that except we reject sin into which we ourselves have plunged, and revert back to the spiritual innocence made available through the righteousness of Christ, that we shall not have an inheritance in the eternal presence of God. So, third, from our precious Lord is Calvin’s blunder again defeated, and the innocence of our children again defended.

On one occasion the Psalmist wrote, “*Lo, children are a heritage of the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is his reward*” (Psalm 127:3). Why? Because as sinners they represent everything we hope to avoid? Certainly not! But rather because spiritually they represent everything that we as adults should hope to achieve...innocence before God.

-Andy Brewer