

The sad saga of human sincerity

“Human faith can be so *sin-cere*,” says a woman with puppy-dog eyes. I say, “That’s a nice Hallmark sentiment, Jill. But sincerity can’t turn fiction to fact.”

Some people dislike my reliance on God’s Word. They say, “Zender, too bad you are so unspiritual. God’s Word is nice, but a spiritual person doesn’t need it. God speaks in the quiet of my soul. I have God’s spirit, and that is my guide. Now let me tell you the word God spoke to me yesterday while I was meditating in my two-hundred degree shower.”



Eureka!
(maybe)

God does speak through these experiences, but so does Satan. And so does the world. And so does the two-hundred degree water of the shower. We succumb to many influences, with God’s spirit being but one of them. Are these personal thoughts useful for living? At times. Should we put faith in them? Not when forming doctrine. A Christian woman once told me that when she drove past the cemetery she “felt the spirits of the dead people” crying out. She sincerely believed it. But scripture says that the dead have perished and know nothing whatsoever (Eccl. 9:5-6.) Who to believe? I choose scripture.

The woman referred to has since gone to work for Hallmark’s Halloween division. ■

Martin Zender's Clanging Gong News

“If I know all mysteries and all knowledge, but have no love,
I am a clanging gong” --1 Cor. 13:1-2



Two out of three isn't bad.

Facts: God’s fodder for faith

I said I would continue last week’s theme, but thank you for indulging my change of mind. I wish to discuss with you the most underrated characteristic of God’s Word: God’s Word is a collection of facts.

Facts before faith

Facts are such splendid things because they are so sure of themselves. Facts will never cave to public opinion or political correctness. But Martin, isn’t everything subjective in this world? Isn’t all truth relative? Doesn’t the world operate on the principle that, “If it’s true for you, then it’s true?” Yes, the world operates on this principle, which speaks eloquently against the principle. There *is* absolute truth, and we find this truth in God’s inspired Word.

God’s Word, rightly translated, is loaded with facts. We don’t often think this way because for some reason we imagine facts to be unspiritual. That God created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1) is a fact. Is this unspiritual?

What about faith? Is not faith more important than fact? How can it be, when faith relies upon fact? Apart from a fact, faith is so much stupidity. You may have the faith required to transplant Mt. Everest to Miami Beach, but unless these places exist in the first place, faith is anchorless.

Whenever you read the word “fact” in this *Clanging Gong News*, do not think of the “facts” of science or finance or medicine or nutrition. These “facts” all tend to change. For instance, it is a fact that coffee is bad for you—until someone discovers next week that it’s not. Let us concern ourselves, for now, with those facts God showcases in His Word.

That God’s facts care so little what you think of them demonstrates the secondary importance of faith. Faith never can verify a fact, it can only agree with it. Thus, faith is less important than a fact. A fact must come first, then faith. Let’s take a practical example.



Flat Earth?

The earth has been round for a long time now, even when people thought for centuries that it was shaped like a manhole cover. Did the earth care that people thought it was shaped like a manhole cover? Not at all. It was not moved in the least to become flat to accord with what people of a yonder age believed. The earth refused to conduct a poll and then conform its shape to popular opinion. Scripture is the same way; I like that about scripture.

Factless faith

Can faith even exist without fact? It sure can, and it’s pitiful. But it happens all the time. People place faith in a lot of things, whether it’s money, politicians, or the weather. Some people even put faith in televangelists.

Televangelist Jim Bakker once had two affairs ongoing simultaneously: one with a million-dollar theme park, the other with Jessica Hahn. Around that time, a man at a print shop I frequented said, “Bakker was a disaster waiting to happen. I never really trusted that weasel. Thank God that such things could never happen to *my* man: Jimmy Swaggart.

(continued on pg. 2)

...God's fodder for faith

(Continued from pg. 1)

Shortly thereafter, Jimmy Swaggart found holy ghost power inside the pants of a woman who was not his wife. This revelation so shook the poor print guy's faith that he almost gave up on God. I talked him out of it, saying, "Give up on Swaggart first, and see what happens."

We humans instinctively want to trust something, or someone; we have a great capacity for faith. God knows this, and provides us a place to turn. That place is not Christian television, folks. And it is not church. It is God's inspired Word.

God cannot lie (Heb. 6:18). Isn't that comforting? What a contrast this provides between God and the rest of the world. ■



What a Revelation!

FAITH TO BE FOUNDED ON INVISIBLE FACTS

Hebrews 11:1, Concordant Version, tells us that faith is "a conviction concerning matters which are not being observed." It is tempting to interpret "not being observed" as "wispy" or "not real." Resist this temptation, and it will flee from you. That which cannot be observed is by no means fictional. Can you see the molten core of earth? No? Does it not then exist? Where is China? I can't see it; it falls under the "not being observed" category, and yet I know it's there because of eyewitness accounts and reliable atlases.

The sacred scriptures are a reliable atlas for thousands of God-breathed facts. Jesus Christ lived, died, took our sins to the grave with Him, and rose from the dead without them, leaving us justified. Because faith needs facts, God arranged for 500 witnesses to see the resurrected Christ, and then had Paul record it (1 Cor. 15:6.) Why go to all that trouble if faith can be founded on fiction? ■

Joel Osteen's faith-genie in a can



There is a mantra in modern Christianity that says, "Just believe, and it will happen." One of the biggest pushers of this drug is Joel Osteen. Osteen puts forward the idea that human faith is a genie in a bottle that can make things appear out of thin air.

Let's say, for instance, that you're a young man just starting out in life. You rightly desire a big house and a beautiful, sexy wife. But God, having your best interests in mind (as opposed to your soulish wants) has decreed eons before your birth that you will have a small house and a wife with a really great personality. But never mind that, because you have faith, and faith is the engine of your Christian life!

VERB OR NOUN?

A guy once said to me: "God promises in the Psalms to give us the desires of our heart. I desire a Mercedes Continental GT, and so I know God will give it to me." I said, "Hm. I always thought 'desires' in that verse was a verb, not a noun. Is this car God's desire, or yours?"

Ha. That's the big mistake. Faith an engine? Not quite. Facts are the engines; faith is the caboose. Faith can only latch onto facts. Facts may be invisible, but they are facts nonetheless (see WHAT A REVELATION! at right.) Because of the emphasis we have put on faith, especially in Paul's evangel, this revelation of faith as caboose may surprise even some of my hardcore readers. Nevertheless, faith answers to fact, and not vice-versa.

Let's consider some facts and apply them to the Osteen example: Romans 8:28—"Now we are aware that God is working all together for the good of those who are loving God, who are called according to the purpose that, whom He foreknew, He designated beforehand, also, to be conformed to the image of His Son."

There are three facts in this verse: 1) God is working all together for the good of those who are loving God, 2) God has a purpose for each one, and 3) each of us has been designated beforehand to be conformed to the image of His Son. Do we read anything here about big houses and beautiful, sexy wives? No. We read that God is working all things together for our good. That is an amazing, blessed fact! Next, we discover the fact that we are an important part of God's overall

Q&A

Surely you are not saying that faith by itself is useless. Isn't this the doctrine of James?

I am not saying that faith without works is dead. In Paul's evangel, faith stands alone apart from works. And yet I still insist that faith apart from facts is useless. These facts are God's works, not ours. ■



NOT.

Rants & Stuff

The Apostle Paul says we should not murmur (Philippians 2:14). Therefore, I shall rant.



I wanted to believe

Union Station, Chicago, is bleak in the winter. Those not racing for trains here sit dejectedly on hardwood benches worn smooth by coat-covered butts. The benches, burned here and there with brown cigarette holes, resemble pews—no doubt receiving more prayers than their ecclesiastical counterparts.



I met the King of the Hobos here in the middle of a cold, white February. He walked up to me in a coffee line and said, “I am the King of the Hobos!”

“Happy to meet you,” I said.

The king had few teeth, and the ones still hanging in sat far in back, interfering with his speech. He wore a wool sports jacket befitting his kingly stature, secured at the third button—the only button. Underneath this jacket was collared, once-white shirt. The king’s gray pants stopped disturbingly short of his brown loafers; unfortunately, his socks had red stripes on the tops. The King had not shaved since perhaps his last cup of coffee.

“Do you drink coffee?” I asked him.

“Sure do!” he said.

I got our order and we sat at a small table. Here, he began spinning yarns of his life as a hobo. Such yarns! If my memory serves me, this man had juggled grapefruit in Bali for one of the tribal queens; he had

raised kangaroos in the Australian outback until a boomerang injury to his “third cervix” inspired him to stow away in a freighter bound for England, but which unfortunately ended up in Hong Kong—but no matter, because he ended up “earning many shekels polishing the shoes of prostitutes and playing ping-pong.”

He was just about to tell me about his involvement with the space program, when a policeman broke up our coffee.

“Jerry! C’mon, Jerry! Let’s move it, now! Out you go!”

At least I know now for a fact—and can report to you today—that the name of the King of the Hobos is Jerry. ■

...genie in a can

(Continued from page 2)

purpose. Thirdly, God long-ago planned this for us, fore-knowing us before we were born. Three amazing facts; who could possibly be disappointed? Well, the poor guy just starting out in life and reading Osteen—that’s who.

Feelings, reasonings, and experiences cannot move facts an inch, and neither can they turn fiction into fact.

Osteen challenges the young man to wish with all his might into the ether and pull out a plum, little realizing that God’s plan for his life is an apricot. What is going to

happen? The guy is either going to kick himself for not having enough faith, or accuse God of not listening to him.

With faith in its proper place, both these ugly outcomes can be avoided. Faith is not the engine that dictates facts, but rather the caboose that follows them. ■

What most y’all don’t realize is that I asked God for a small church and an ugly wife—and I got screwed!

