

He pulled anchor and blew up the lighthouse

It took me a week to figure out why Pastor Kent wanted (and succeeded in getting) the proposition erased that night. It took me two weeks to sort out his arguments.

It is my conviction that Clay Kent panicked when he saw that he would be held to one side of the free will argument. He had planned to ride a teeter-totter, but I took that away by putting all the weight on one side of the board. I believe Kent's spirit was embarrassed to have this particular side emphasized: "*Man's will can be independent of God.*" His spirit choked on so public an announcement of a point that his flesh would defend throughout the competition.

In a debate, the proposition is the anchor; the lighthouse; the point to navigate by. The proposition answers to the lines on a football field. A minute before the debate,



Clay Kent pulled anchor, blew up the lighthouse, and erased the lines. He removed our reference point. Thus, he ensured that no progress could be measured, no penalties could be assessed, and no clear conclusion could be reached. Yet this kind of confusion and evasion is essential if anyone is to affirm the free will of man *and* the sovereignty of God simultaneously. To believe both and not be pegged as crazy, one must obliterate law and order.

But you already know this if you have ever argued with a free will of man/sovereignty of God hypocrite. ■

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.

What *really* happened at the Kent Debate

...continued from last week

Pastor R. Clay Kent balanced himself, stared at the white board, then slowly lifted his cane as if to shoot a hole through the words written there:

MAN'S WILL CAN BE INDEPENDENT OF GOD.

"Ohhh, no!" said Kent in a sing-songy voice that belied his 75 years. "This deck is stacked! This debate is slanted in your favor before it even begins! *You* can't write that on the board! Man's will can be independent of *God*? Only an *idiot* would believe that!"

If my jaw hadn't been hinged to my skull, it would have been sitting on the table next to my Bible. *That rascal!* Yet hadn't I sensed that something like this would happen? I just didn't know it would be this particular thing, or that it would occur two minutes before the start of the debate. Kent was unpredictable, I knew, but I thought our formally structured arrangement would head off Kent's rascality at the pass. So much for that idea!

Debate moderator Rick Farwell walked quickly around my side of the table toward Kent. He

"There we stood, three adults turned to wax."

had heard Kent's remarks, as had about a quarter of the congregation. As Rick passed me, I looked up and said, "Um, Rick? Didn't you say that Clay had agreed to this proposition?"

Rick seemed a little panicked and never even looked at me. In a flash, he was at the side of my opponent, who had now advanced to the table to place a hand upon it. Rick spoke as if this was the most normal thing that had ever happened at the Pauline Church of Christ.

"Uh, yeah, Clay," Rick said. "We discussed this on the telephone, remember? And you agreed to argue the affirmative of this proposition."

Rick seemed a little panicked and never even looked at me. In a flash, he was at the side of my opponent, who had now advanced to the table to place a hand upon it.

Rick spoke as if this was the most normal thing that had ever happened at the Pauline Church of Christ.



Kent ran his long fingers through his Vincent Price haircut. "I am *not* having a debate with *that* on the board," Kent insisted. "Only an *idiot* would believe that anything could be independent of God."

"But Clay," Rick insisted, "you *did* agree over the phone that—"

"Then I must not have been clear about what you were talking about," Kent interrupted. "I must not have understood the proposition."

Not likely, I thought to myself.

So there we stood, three adults turned to wax, the gazing stock of believers gathered from 13 states to witness "The Great Debate." I had studied for weeks for this thing and, by golly, I was going to salvage it.

Recovered now from my initial shock, I said, "Then we'll come up with a new proposition. This shouldn't be so hard. How about, 'Man has a free will.' You argue for it, and I'll argue against it."

"No," said Pastor Kent. "That's no good."

"How about, 'Man has a *limited* free will,'" I said.

Clay looked troubled. "That's no good either," he said. "I don't want the word 'free' anywhere up there."

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...what *really* happened at the Kent Debate

(Continued from pg. 1)

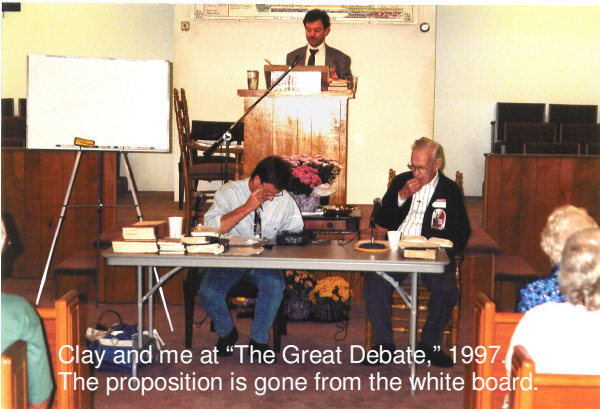
"But Clay," I protested. "You use the word 'free' all the time. You use it on your tapes. I know you believe man has a limited free will. I've heard you say it. So why don't we use it?"

"If I ever used the word 'free,'" Kent explained, "I must have been drunk."

Theologically inebriated

Of course, I had listened to several of Kent's tapes before the debate, and had copied some of his comments, verbatim, into my notebook. On one of the tapes, #358, "The Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart," Clay said, "Pharaoh was free to choose." Was Clay drunk when he made tape #358?

Not three minutes into the debate itself, Clay



Clay and me at "The Great Debate," 1997. The proposition is gone from the white board.

Kent said, "I think God can allow men to have a certain amount of freedom, if I can use that word, and still work all things out for the counsel of His will." Was Clay drunk at the debate?

Later he said, "First of all, I do not believe that because God gives man a certain amount of freedom, that means that God is not in control." Later he said, "Scriptures like, 'he has power over his own will;' that's an absolute statement. And don't sit here and tell me that God isn't giving him that freedom. I'll use the word 'freedom.'"

And he used it liberally.

By his own admission, Clay was drunk when he said these things. And he was drunk on tape #358. I know that Pastor Clay Kent was not drunk, alcoholically. But he sure was lit up in a theological sense.

After the debate, I talked to an old friend of the pastor's who had once asked Clay why he made so many tapes yet never committed anything to writing. "When you write something down," Clay answered, "someone can hold you to it."

That must have included propositions written upon white boards, for ours was promptly erased. ■

Thinking banished at the Kent debate

Have you ever tried to debate someone who takes both sides of the argument? Try debating a person who says, "God does not make every detail in this world go," then later says, "God makes every detail in this world go," then, when confronted with the contradiction, denies it. Try debating someone who says, "I never use the word 'free,'" then uses it liberally, then tells his opponent not to say he uses it.

A man came up to me after the debate and wondered why I looked flustered. "Jesus wouldn't be flustered," the man said. "Jesus would be calm and peaceful." Happy always to convince someone I'm not Jesus, I hit the man in the nose and refused to heal him. Then I said, "You try debating someone who takes your side of the argument *and* his own!" Then I slunk to my room to watch *I Love Lucy* re-runs—something else Jesus never would have done.

A "strange and wonderful antinomy"

"Paul makes no effort to solve the strange and wonderful antinomy that God is sovereign, though man has his freedom. No one can answer these problems, and no one should attempt to solve them in this life."

So writes Alexander Thomson in *The Differentiator*, a magazine I know to have been the source of Kent's doctrine. I only wish Pastor Kent had been so honest to admit that belief in the sovereignty of God *and* in the free will of man is a problem so impossible that no explanation exists for it in this life. At least then we could have scheduled the debate for the next life, when I plan to be more like Jesus.

"I greatly doubt if any solution is possible that is comprehensive to our minds as they are now," writes R.B. Withers from the

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What a Revelation!

BELIEVERS! MAKE UP YOUR MINDS!



HIGHLIGHTING PASTOR KENT'S CONTRADICTIONS AT THE FAIRVIEW DEBATE WILL HELP OTHERS AVOID THE PITFALL

Verbatim Kent quotes from the debate tapes:

Tape 1, tape counter position 136:

"I think God can allow men to have a certain amount of freedom, if I can use that word, and still work all things out for the counsel of His will."

Tape 1, tape counter position 302:

"I will ask my opponent, then, not to use the phrase 'free will.' I may have said that sometime in the past, but I don't use the word 'free,' I use the word 'will.'"



Tape 1, tape counter position 202:

"'Til when shall I bear with you?'—(Mt. 17:17.) God suffers and tolerates such in this world. He bears. He doesn't make every little thing go."

Tape 1, tape counter position 869:

"God makes every detail in this world go."



Tape 1, tape counter position 652:

"Scriptures like, 'he has the power over his own will' (1 Cor. 7:37). That's an absolute statement."

Tape 1, tape counter position 654:

"I know that God doesn't give us absolute freedom. Anybody who'd believe that would be an idiot."



Tape 1, tape counter position 980:

(Commenting on 2 Cor. 5:18, "Yet all is of God"): "Yet all..."—that does not mean every detail in all the world, but it means all this he has just spoken of in the two verses that begin with, and the verse that follows."

Tape 1, tape counter position 983:

Zender: "Do you believe that all the details of life are out of, through, and for God?" Kent: "Yes. Sure."

Rants & Stuff

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



Luuuuuucy! I'm hoooooome!"

The best part about the Kent Debate was when I went back to my motel room to watch *I Love Lucy* re-runs. At least *I Love Lucy* made sense; Fred and Ethel never seemed more rational to me.

What strange world had I just come from? The shifting fog of human reasoning so clouded the debate that Pastor Farwell burned the videotapes. Before I left that weekend, I told the conference-goers from the podium: "I am going to get to the bottom of what happened here. I haven't quite got it figured out yet, but when I do, I promise you that I will report back." I ended up writing them: "Without a lighthouse, we were all out to sea."



I am convinced that whatever measure of God's spirit inhabited Clay Kent, it assured him of the impossibility of human free will. Clay's flesh, however, resisted this truth. As long as this eon lasts, human flesh will struggle

for at least a modicum of independence from the Deity. The spirit opposes this, and successfully conquers it in some people.

It is this classic struggle between spirit and flesh that caused Pastor Kent to repeatedly contradict himself. It's the same struggle that caused Withers and Thomson to trash the human brain. It's the same struggle that turns Christians against those who really do embrace God's sovereignty. But to embrace God's sovereignty is to necessarily reject the free will of man.

Even Fred Mertz knows that. ■

...thinking banished at the Kent debate

(Continued from pg. 2) same magazine, commenting on the same problem. Now I see why the debate didn't work. I went to South Carolina with my mind as it is now. How was I to know that this strange little debate would require a different kind of mind—a mind that no one will possess until the resurrection?

Defining terms

The word "free" means, "exempt from external restriction or control." In whatever measure a person is free, God is not controlling that person. Either God is in control, or a person is free; no one can say both and make sense. "Limited free will" is

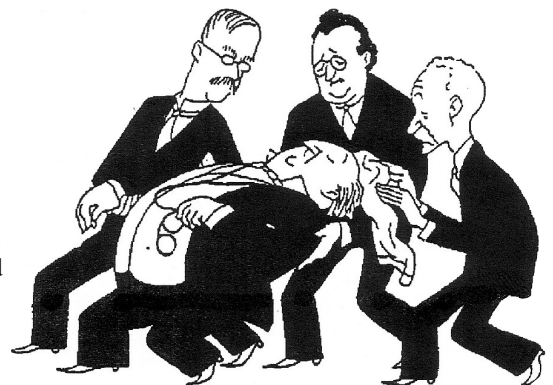
doubly stupid. "Limited" means "restricted," and "freedom," again, means "exempt from restriction." A person who has limited freedom, therefore, has restricted exemption from restriction, not to mention a headache.

If people who claim to believe such things wish to avoid the label, "crazy," they must learn to employ the "Thompson/Withers" technique, explaining that their concepts transcend human perception. All conversation is then put on hold until the next life. Or, they can employ the "Kent Tactic," and roll merrily along as trains crash behind them.

These ridiculous techniques are cop-outs for a problem that does not exist. There is no problem, no contradiction, no struggle, and no strain for the God-given brain to simply believe the scrip-

tural statement that "God is operating all in accord with the counsel of His own will" (Eph. 1:11).

See how simple the truth is? ■



Following a foolhardy, solo attempt to grasp Kent's position with his present mind, debate attendee Alfred Spielman is helped from the building.