

## Dare to be happy

THAT WHICH IS OUT OF FAITH IS NOT SIN

"Now he who is doubting if he should be eating is condemned, seeing that it is not out of faith. Now everything which is not out of faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23).

If you are a Catholic but have no qualms about eating meat on Friday during Lent, then you can eat with a good conscience and not sin. But if you doubt and still eat, you violate your conscience and sin. It's your own conscience—not God—that makes a thing sin.

God imparts to each a measure of faith (Rom. 12:3). How much faith do you have? Measure your freedom. Those with little faith have little freedom, while those with big faith are now free to wander about the cabin.

Lots of faith not only puts wiggle-room in your life, but space enough to do cartwheels in.

It's the corollary of this verse that shocks: If that which is not out of faith is sin, then that which is out of faith is *not* sin. Paul begins this section by talking about food, but then applies the principle to "everything."

"Happy is he who is not judging himself in that which he is attesting" (Rom. 14:22).

Who knew that we were actually allowed to be happy in this life?



# 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.

## Spiritual liberty: Test, then go for it

Gray might be a good color for a man's suit, but when it comes to living a vibrant and happy life in Christ, gray lacks faith. Be fully assured in your own mind about what you believe and how you want to live. Decide what you're all about, then live with conviction and trust God.

"One, indeed, is deciding for one day rather than another day, yet one is deciding for every day. Let each one be fully assured in his own mind. He who is disposed to the day, is disposed to it to the Lord; and he who is eating, is eating to the Lord, for he is thanking God" (Rom. 14:5-6).

Some people of Paul's acquaintance knew that God had gifted them with every single day. In the old days of Israel, the most important day on which to worship God was the Sabbath. For us, no one day is above another, especially not Sunday. Not everyone knows this. To those who do know it: know it with all your heart. To those who don't know it: know it with all your heart. This is my conclusion.

I used to hound people over spiritual liberty. Nowadays, I try one or two times to pry the religion from someone, then quit. If they're still antagonistic, I surrender them to God. If they're doing (or not doing) for the glory of



God, God will recognize it. If they're playing a game and trying to score points with the Deity, the work doesn't count. The nice thing for me is, I don't have to figure the other person out. I walk away and return to my own luxurious faith-world. This may come across as cold, but I prefer to think of it as protecting my own peace and happiness.

Here is one of the most liberating passages of scripture: "The faith which you have, have for yourself in God's sight. Happy is he who is not judging himself in that which he is attesting" (Rom. 14:22).

"Attesting" is based on the Greek word *dokimazo*, whose English root is "test." We've all

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## Glorious mind times

Whatever is true, whatever is grave, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is agreeable, whatever is renowned—if there is any virtue, and if any applause, be taking these into account" (Phil. 4:8).

The Greek word translated "account" here is elsewhere in the Concordant Literal New Testament translated, "reckon." Reckoning is an activity of the mind. The mind can go anywhere, with or without the body. The

mind is our greatest gift, granting us access into every room of God's kaleidoscopic Mansion.

While stuck in an airplane flying home from Amarillo, I wanted neither magazine nor music. My greatest source of satisfaction sits on top of my neck. I opened the door to my mind; it looked like a candy store and smelled like a bakery in there. When I say "candy," I do not mean to imply superficiality or emptiness, but gorgeous flavor. I'm talking about true candy, grave candy, just candy, pure candy,

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## ...spiritual liberty

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tested our boundaries. Just how free are we in Christ? Are we allowed to sleep in on Sunday? Listen to “worldly” music? Goof off? Eat fried squid? Pursue an odd hobby or a misunderstood occupation? If you’ve tested the borders on these and other things, and you still feel God’s warm smile, then don’t just be assured of your freedom: be *fully* assured. Live in it. Kick off your shoes and luxuriate in your own mind.

Paul’s only concern: don’t flaunt your freedom in front of a weak brother. “For if, because of food, your brother is sorrowing, you are no longer walking according to love” (Rom. 14:15).

## ...mind times

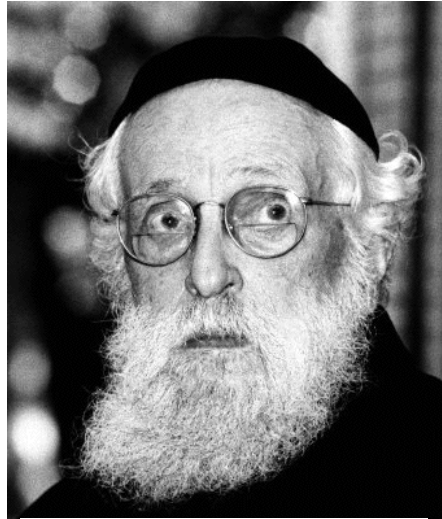
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and certainly *agreeable* candy. (The bakery speaks for itself.) Why can’t any and all of these things—even that which is grave—be sweetness to the mental palate?

“Grave” is “weighty, momentous, or important.” It has nothing to do with depression or boredom. My trip to Amarillo was weighty, momentous, and important, and from recollections of this I gleaned the deepest pleasure.

I also thought of my wife. This occurred somewhere over Oklahoma, I reckon. Melody would fall under the “pure” and “virtuous” category, and it was easy to

In other words, don’t eat squid on the Sabbath in front of a rabbi while listening to “Magic Carpet Ride.” ■



“I hate that song. And I don’t much care for your ridiculous cephalopod, either.”

think of her. The light of the cabin seemed worthy of applause just then, so I used that to backlight Melody. Then the flight attendant came by wearing a renowned brand of perfume, so I thought about Chanel N<sup>o</sup>. 5 for awhile. Southwest Airlines makes great coffee and I had some, so I put Chanel on hold and entered a Costa Rican bean field. God hovered above all this activity, smiling—and that was the richest flavor of all. ■

## Texas Successes!



Host Todd Miller and Yours Truly in front of The Big Texan, off I-40 in Amarillo, Texas, March 21, 2009.

**Y**ou are not alone in your peculiar walk with Christ. There is a fine bunch of folks in Amarillo, Texas, who rely on Christ’s faith rather than their own, rejoice in the salvation of all, and endure evil right along with you in this current wicked eon. The body of Christ suffers together, but we shall also be glorified together.

A special thanks to Dollie Miller for opening her home for the meetings and making everyone feel at home. I would also like to acknowledge two young men I’d never met, Jeremy Trull and Paul Hulzebos, who drove three and five hours, respectively, to attend the meetings. They went away satisfied. ■

## What a Revelation!

HOW OUR LORD DINED WITH PROSTITUTES AND TAXMEN

“I have perceived and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is contaminating of itself, except that the one reckoning anything to be contaminating, to that one it is contaminating” (Rom. 15:14).

We know that our Lord hobnobbed with the “scum of society,” and had a good time doing it. Here is how He accomplished that: He had the faith that nothing is contaminating of *itself*. “All, indeed, is clean to the clean, yet to the defiled and unbelieving nothing is clean” (Ti. 1:15).

Don’t try this at home. Our Lord had copious amounts of faith. Let your own conscience and faith be your guide.

But isn’t it remarkable that prostitutes will precede priests into the kingdom of God? (Mt. 21:31). ■



## Q&A

### SPIRITUAL MASOCHISM

**Paul said in 2 Cor. 7:4 that he was “superexceeding in joy” in all his afflictions. That sounds perverted to me. How could this be?**

It wasn’t just Paul. In Acts 5, the Sanhedrin lashed the apostles, and yet the apostles left the place “rejoicing that they were deemed worthy to be dishonored for the sake of the Name” (Acts 5:41). Were these men masochists? Yes. They mentally converted their pain to pleasure by associating their suffering with Something exceedingly beautiful to them: the love and acceptance of Christ. Same with Stephen. How could a man rejoice in the stoning pit? Like this: “Lo! I am beholding the heavens opened up, and the Son of Mankind standing at the right hand of God!” (Acts 7:56).

Spiritual endorphins are real.

# Rants & Stuff

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

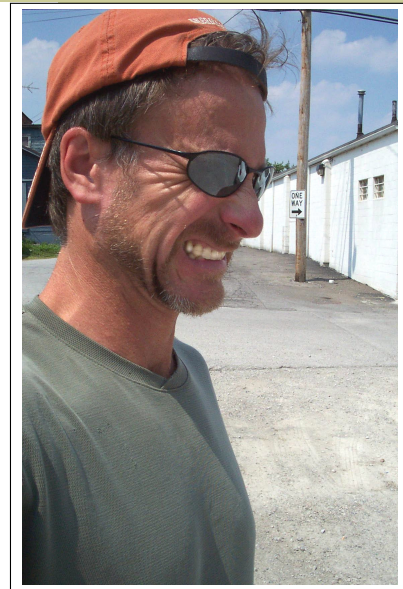
## This is the day that the *Lord* has made? You've got to be *kidding* me.

I used to work the breakfast shift at a restaurant chain in Canton, Ohio. I was not very good at eggs, but I had pancakes down pat. Our boss, Rich Barton, was a stingy man with a Hitler mustache. We got a 10% discount on food, but Barton still didn't want us eating much on our breaks. "Only one pancake, Zender," he would say, so I'd make myself a pancake the size of a manhole cover. It took up two plates; a waitress had to help me carry it to my table. Barton saw it one day and said, "Zender, that pancake is illegal!" "Yes, sir," I said, "but so was the invasion of Poland." My syrup was delivered in a watering can.

Barton was a church guy, so a bunch of people from his congregation came in on Wednesday mornings for a prayer meeting and some of my delicious eggs. These people sang the same song every Wednesday: "This Is The Day That The Lord Has Made." That seemed like sound doctrine to my twenty year-old self, but I wasn't so sure about the rest of the song: "I will rejoice and be glad in it."

"What if the day *sucks*?" I whispered to my fellow cook, Scott Kistler. "Are we supposed to be glad in it *then*?" Scott thought for a moment and said, "I don't know, Zender, but your toast is burning."

It has taken me twenty-eight years and lots of spiritual growth to answer my own question. Does God make some really bad days? Yes. Did the Wednesday group



## "Zender, that pancake is illegal!"

recognize that? I doubt it; they were in a church trance and would never have acknowledged God's use of evil. So how does one reconcile an evil day with gladness and rejoicing? It's so simple to me now:

"This is the sucky day that the Lord has made; I will rejoice and be glad in it." ■



"I just found out that Crest is discontinuing my favorite style of whitening strips. Praise the Lord!"

## Spiritual Realism

I have read several positive thinking books and they all have the same flaw: every situation, however bad, must be considered good. I once knew an irritating guy who said there was no such thing as a bad time. A car would run over his dog, and he'd say, "Isn't that wonderful?" The man was kidding himself, and he knew it. He eventually gave up; denial of the obvious became too exhausting for him.

We are realists. There is a difference between seeking the silver lining in an evil circumstance and pretending that the evil circumstance is good. We are of the former persuasion. God Himself recognizes good and evil in this eon, and so must we. The great advantage we have is knowing that God is working all together for good (Rom. 8:28), even the evil. There really are silver linings in everything, and these are both agreeable and pure. ■