

# THE LOWER LIGHTS

Alan Jones, Editor  
(734) 942-7956



**"Brightly beams our Father's mercy  
from the lighthouse evermore;  
But to us He gives the keeping  
of the lights along the shore."**

**Published monthly by the church of Christ, 35900 Palmer Road, P.O. Box 86-233, Westland, MI 48186**  
**Volume 1** **July, 2001** **No 1**

## THE LOWER LIGHTS

Michigan's 124 lighthouses have largely been reduced to tourist attractions by the electronic equipment of modern ships. But, in another era, their beacons shone through the fog and darkness, bringing many a sailor to the shores of the Great Lakes, who otherwise would have been lost or shipwrecked.

When Jesus began His work among men, the prophecy was fulfilled which said, "The people who were sitting in darkness saw a great light, and to those who were sitting in the land and shadow of death, upon them a light dawned." (Mt 4:16). He was (and is) the true light, which, coming into the world, enlightens every man." (Jn 1:9)

Jesus, the Light of the World (Jn 8:12), dispels the darkness of ignorance with the knowledge of God (2 Cor 4:6), shines through the fog of error that men may see the truth (2 Pet 1:19-2:3), and reveals the way of righteousness that men may come out of the shadows of sin (Jn 3:19-21). He has brought many a sinner safely to heavenly shores who otherwise would have perished eternally in hell (Acts 26:18).

The light of Jesus shines through His gospel. This precious treasure has been placed in the earthen vessels of men so that the greatness of its power is from God, not men. The content (the message that Christ Jesus is Lord)

is so much greater than the containers who carry it to men (bondservants for Jesus' sake) (2 Cor 4:4-7).

How truly honored was Paul when Isaiah's prophecy about Jesus, the Light to the Gentiles, was secondarily applied to him as he was commanded to take the gospel to the Gentiles, "I have placed you as a light for the Gentiles, that you should bring salvation to the end of the earth." (Acts 13:47). In the same way, we, too, are humbled by the honor of bringing the Light to men through the preaching of the gospel.

P.P. Bliss, the writer of the familiar hymn, had this in mind when he referred to Christians who live and teach the gospel as "the lower lights". Though Jesus is the Lighthouse, His disciples have an important role to play in rescuing men from sin and hell.

With this paper we "send a gleam across the wave" with the hope that "eager eyes are watching, longing for the lights along the shore." Perhaps your eyes are among those straining in the darkness of ignorance, religious error, and sin. We pray that as we present the gospel in writing, we may point you to the Light who will bring you to the shore of salvation. We invite you also to our worship assemblies and would be delighted to study with you in your home.

## **TIGER FANS EVERYWHERE!!**

I have been a fan of the Detroit Tigers since they won the World Series in 1968. I've rooted for them, win or lose (mostly lose) ever since.

A few years ago, when I moved to Newark, OH, I began noticing the **D** symbol of the Tigers on reflectors which were attached to rural mailboxes. I said to myself, "There are Tiger fans everywhere!"

I believed this for several weeks, until one day while reading the newspaper, it dawned on me. The **D** was not the symbol of the Tigers, but of the Columbus Dispatch newspaper. The reflectors were not a show of support by Tiger fans, but were to aid those who delivered the paper! I had failed to put the symbol in its context.

The biggest problem in men's interpretation of the Scriptures is a failure to keep its statements in their context. To tempt Jesus (Mt 4:5-7), the Devil quoted Ps 91:11-12, "He will give His angels charge concerning you; and On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone." Does this passage say, as the Devil interpreted it to say, that men should make a dangerous jump, expecting that the angels will catch them?

NO! Jesus replied to the Devil, "on the other hand it is written" and quoted Dt 6:16. Jesus showed that one must take every passage of Scripture in the context of the rest of the Scriptures. One cannot interpret any passage in such a way as it contradicts another passage. The Scriptures must harmonize. Since Dt 6:16 said, "You shall not put the Lord your God to the test", Ps 91:11-12 cannot mean that Jesus (or anyone else) should jump, counting on God's protection.

The Devil made Psalms 91 say what he wanted it to say. Why did I see Tiger symbols on the mailbox poles? Because that is what I wanted the **D** to mean.

We must be careful not to take the Scriptures out of their context because we are looking for what we want to find rather than what the Lord is saying. If we look at the Scriptures with prejudiced minds, we will find our belief, as I found Tiger fans, EVERYWHERE! And, sadly, like the Devil, we will twist the Scriptures to our own destruction! (2 Pet 3:15-16)

Let us find in the Scriptures only what God has intended. Our salvation depends on it!!

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**Volume 1** **Aug, 2001** **No 2**

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## **NO CLERGY: A RADICAL IDEA**

The *Detroit Free Press* recently did a feature story on a church in the metro area which is going to great lengths to be non-traditional. According to the newspaper, their most radical idea is that they have no "clergy".

It is hard to imagine "Christianity" without the "clergy" (from Greek for "chosen"). In both Catholic and Protestant Churches there are those who make up a specially chosen class of Christians. They have special titles (e.g. "Father", "Bishop", and "Reverend"), many of them wear special clothes (robes and collars), and they are ordained to serve in the role of a priest, , officiating for the church in preaching, baptizing, serving the Lord's Supper, marrying, praying for the sick, performing funerals, etc. The "laity" (from Greek for "people") cannot perform these services and they must depend on the clergy in order to worship and have their spiritual needs met. Yes, compared to common practice, the idea of "no clergy" is radical, but is it radical when compared to the New Testament?

In the Old Testament, God set up a special priesthood. Aaron and his sons were ordained as priests to draw near to God and offer sacrifices for the people and the rest of the tribe of Levi were appointed to assist them (Num 18:1-7). But, God set up the Old Testament system to show men that they needed something better. The priests were weak. Before they offered sacrifices for the people, they had to offer sacrifices for their own sins first (Heb 7:27-28). The priests were mortal. They died and had to be replaced by someone else (Heb 7:23). But Jesus, who is sinless and lives forever to provide continual service, fulfils man's need for a priest (Heb 7:24-28). All Christians are encouraged to boldly draw near to God through Him (Heb 4:14-16;

10:19-22). Why then should we look to sinful, mortal men as mediators between us and God?

In His gospel, Jesus teaches that all Christians are priests, capable of offering spiritual sacrifices (1 Pet 2:5,9). He therefore never required a special ordination at the hands of men for one to preach, baptize, serve the Lord's Supper, pray for the sick, etc. He taught the "radical" idea that the subjects of His kingdom would all be of the same class, "servants" (Mt 20:25-28). He condemned wearing special clothing to draw the attention of men and the use of special titles such as "Rabbi" and "Father" which exalt men (Mt 23:5-11).

But, as early as Tertullian (A.D. 155-223), "Christians" had begun to compare the elders with the priests and the Levites with the deacons and to say that others should teach, baptize, and serve the Lord's Supper only when "circumstances required it" (elders and deacons couldn't do it). By the time of Cyprian (A.D. 195-268), they had begun to use the Greek word "kleros" to describe those who were financially supported to devote themselves to spiritual work (as the priests and Levites of the O.T.) as "clergy" (Neander's History of the Christian Church, Vol 1, p. 195-96). How quickly men brought into Christianity the Old Testament setup of men drawing near to God through a special class of men!

Now, after hundreds of years, the clergy system is so developed, accepted, and ingrained into "Christianity" that to depart from it seems radical. But to do so is to return to Christianity the way that Jesus set it up. May more men make this "radical" move to enjoy the blessing of serving God directly through Jesus and not through a separate and exalted class of men!! We shine the light of truth through the fog of error that men may see the truth!

## **A CHURCH MAKING UP IT'S OWN RULES?: NOW THAT IS RADICAL!!**

The headline of the *Detroit Free Press* story about a church in the metro area (see pg 1) read, "Church excels without rules". How is it possible for people to worship and work together as a spiritual body without rules? It isn't.

A closer look at the newspaper article reveals that the church does have rules. The *Free Press* writer reports that "It makes up its own rules, designs its own religious experiences..." How then are they "without rules"? This church is "without rules" in that they came together initially without subjecting themselves to a particular set of previously established rules, as is the case with most new churches. New Catholic Churches are formed under the rules of the Catholic Catechism, new Methodist Churches are founded upon the rules of the Methodist Discipline, new Baptist Churches are set up using the rules of the Baptist Manual, etc... The way this church has come together is, as reported, "beyond radical", for, as the article puts it, "few people anywhere have seen a church like this".

But, given time and human nature, this church will have set rules and their worship experiences will become traditional. Perhaps other churches across the country and around the world will be established using their rules and worship forms. Maybe even a denominational organization will be formed and a Guidebook will be written. New believers will come into the Church by subjecting themselves to the existing rules. Then the once "beyond radical" group will have become as "traditional" as the Catholics, Methodists, Baptists,

etc. Will it happen with this church? Who knows? But the 100's of denominations in existence show that it has happened many times before.

What does the New Testament say about rules for churches? The people of God belong to the "kingdom of God's beloved Son" (Col 1:13). Where do the rules in a "kingdom" come from? From the king, of course. It is not surprising then to find that in the N.T. local churches were told to follow the rules of King Jesus rather than to make up their own rules or to follow rules men previously established.

Paul told the church at Corinth that he was sending Timothy to remind them of his ways in Christ (the King) which he taught everywhere in every church (1 Cor 4:17). The apostle scolded the Galatian churches for quickly deserting Christ for another gospel, really not another but a perversion of the one true gospel (Gal 1:6-9). He exhorted the Thessalonian church to "hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us" (2 Thess 2:15).

A church which makes up its own rules or follows those already made up by men is "beyond radical" when compared to the New Testament. Are you a part of a church which is following the rules of men? Should you be? Why not do something "radical"? Leave that church and join yourself to a local church which has for its rules only the New Testament, the rules of Jesus, the King. We shine the light of truth through the fog of error that men may see the truth!

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**Volume 1** **Sept, 2001** **No 3**

## YOU NEED JESUS

Are you interested in hearing the gospel of Jesus? If not, perhaps it is because you do not see that you need what Jesus is able to supply. Follow me through John's account of the life of Jesus and I will show you how He is the answer to all that is lacking in your life. Jesus is:

**Water for your thirst (Jn 4:7-15):** A woman of Samaria made the same long trip day after day to draw water from Jacob's well. When Jesus offered her water which would forever quench her thirst, she jumped at the chance. Immediately, she asked Him to give her some of that water. But, Jesus was speaking of a lasting spiritual satisfaction, which man cannot find on his own, as his sin constantly mars his relationship with God, robbing him of all joy and peace, leaving him forever "thirsty". You need to drink Jesus' living water.

**Bread for your hunger (Jn 6:35-63):** Jesus miraculously gave bread, which the ancients called "the staff of life", to 5000 men (and women and children besides) to show them that He is the "bread of life". He said, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he shall live forever; and the bread also which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh." Many of His disciples forsook Him after this statement. They thought He meant that they must literally eat His body and drink His blood. He meant rather that men must partake of His sacrifice on the cross if they are to enjoy spiritual life, an eternal relationship with God. You need to eat this Bread.

**Light for your blindness (Jn 9, cp. 8:12, 3:19-21):** A blind man who Jesus cured could see what the Pharisees refused to see. He told these "blind" men, "Here is an amazing thing, that you do not know where He is from, and yet He opened my eyes."

But the Pharisees put him out of the synagogue, choosing to ignore the obvious, that Jesus is the "light of the world". He provides all who *want* to see with the spiritual understanding necessary to examine themselves to make sure that their actions are approved by God. You need this Light.

**A Shepherd for your guidance and protection (Jn 10):** Men who live their lives as they please are like sheep which, when left to themselves, will graze on the same spot until there is nothing left. Jesus promises that if men follow His leadership they will not find themselves in the ruts caused by the destructive habits of sin, but will find pasture and an abundant life. If men will, as sheep, only listen to the Shepherd's voice, He will also protect them from "strangers" and "wolves" of false teachers who would destroy them. You need this Shepherd.

**Resurrection for your body (Jn 11):** Jesus raised Lazarus after he had been dead for four days, proving His claim that He is "The Resurrection and the Life". Man needs hope. In the middle of life's struggles, He needs to know that this life is not all there is. He needs to know that death will not end his relationship with God, but that, through the power of Jesus, he will be able to truly have "eternal life", an eternal relationship with God. You need the hope of this Resurrection.

Do you see your need for Jesus? I hope that thinking about your need for Jesus has sparked an your interest in His gospel. **Shannon Shaffer of Greenwood, IN will be with the church from September 23-28 to preach the gospel of Jesus. Shannon will be speaking Sunday at 10 AM and Monday-Friday at 7:30 PM. Won't you join us?**

## A FREE GIFT!!

The title of this article probably caught your eye. The advertising industry recognizes the appeal of the word "free" and uses it to much advantage.

If the church were to offer a "free" new car to everyone who came to worship next Sunday, we would not be able to hold all the people. How tragic it is that something of much greater value, not that we have to offer, but that God offers, is not even given consideration by most- "the free gift of eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom 6:23).

It is impossible to begin to understand, much less appreciate, the "free gift" which God has offered without first seeing man's need for it. All of us have sinned and are deserving of death (having our relationship with God forever ended- Rom 3:23, 6:23). We can't repay God for what we have done to Him so that we can enjoy His fellowship (Mt 18:24).

Out of God's great love, Jesus died for us, paying the debt that we could not pay, giving us life (an eternal relationship with God- Rom 5:5-11). This story illustrates the high cost of this "free gift":

In the summer of 1937, John Griffith, the controller of a great railroad bridge which spanned the Mississippi River, took his eight year old son, Greg, with him to work. At noon, John put the bridge up for some on-coming ships. Then he led Greg to the observation deck to eat lunch.

Soon John was startled by the shrieking of a train whistle in the distance. He had forgotten the

1:07 express for Memphis. He raced back to the control tower. Just as he was about to pull the lever to close the bridge, he caught a glimpse of a horrifying sight - his son had fallen from the observation deck into the great gears that operated the bridge.

There was no time to free Greg. What to do? If John pulled the lever, he would crush his son between four tons of grinding steel. But, four hundred people were on the train headed for the river!

John heaved the lever of massive gears. The Memphis Express thundered across the bridge. With tear-filled eyes, John looked into the windows of the passing train. Businessmen were reading newspapers, conductors were looking at their pocket-watches, ladies were sipping coffee, while children pushed long spoons into dishes of ice cream. In agony, John cried out to the train, "I sacrificed my son for you! Don't you even care!" Nobody heard.

God, who sacrificed His Son by the horrible death of crucifixion so that men might live (1 Pet 1:1:18-19, 2:24), must many times cry out to earth, "I sacrificed My Son for you! Don't you even care!" So many are living without thought and without appreciation of God's free gift. His gift is conditional. To receive it, men must respond in faith by obeying Jesus' gospel (Eph 2:8-9; Rom 16:26). Sadly, most fail to respond, choosing to live as they please and to receive the wages for their sins one day in hell, rather than let Jesus pay what is due for them (Rom 6:23). Don't *you* turn down God's free gift!!

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**Volume 1**

**Oct, 2001**

**No 4**

## FALLING LEAVES, RISING FAITH

When we think of Autumn, we think of leaves. Certainly, we call this season Fall due to the leaves falling from the trees as the crisp wind blows. This month, as the leaves change from green to bright red, orange, and yellow and fall to the ground, let us look beyond what our eyes behold and appreciate to see that this wondrous process provides us with a basis for belief in God.

What outdoor scene would we place on a calendar for October, 3001? Would it not be one which showed trees with beautiful color with leaves scattered about beneath them? The changing of seasons is so predictable that weather forecasters can tell you the peak time for viewing the fall colors in any particular area. Is this by design or merely by chance? This predictability was promised by God after the flood when He said to Noah, "While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease." (Genesis 8:22)

As we marvel at the brilliant Fall foliage, do we stop to wonder- Why don't the leaves just turn black when they die? How is it, that of all the creatures on the earth, only man can see the colors and appreciate them? How marvelous is our eyesight which enables us to see the spectacular show? How marvelous is our mental capacity for the aesthetic, our love and admiration of beauty?

All of these questions point us to God and His glory and to man's place as the crown of His creation. As Paul wrote, "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made" (Romans

1:20). Truly, to look at the leaves and to deny God is to be as Paul goes on to say, "without excuse". And, when we behold all that has been made just for our appreciation, we must humbly marvel as David, "What is man, that Thou dost take thought of him? And the son of man that Thou dost care for him?" (Psalms 8:4)

What do we do when the pretty colors fill our yard? We rake them. Why? We see them as clutter which has to be cleaned up. There is in us a desire for order. This same desire prompted us to mow our yards, to plant our flowers and vegetables in rows, and to weed our gardens.

Where does this compulsion we have for order come from? It comes from the One who made the universe, the "cosmos" (from Greek for "orderly or harmonious arrangement", cp. our word "cosmetics"). As the changing seasons and the changing leaves point out, He created an orderly world.

The special theory of evolution has a giant flaw. After the "big bang", how did the chaos which resulted become the "cosmos" which we see today? Did disorder become order by accident? By chance? By the passing of time?

Why do we rake our leaves? We are compelled from within to be orderly because we were made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26), who is orderly. As the saying goes, "Like Father, like son".

As the leaves change and fall, may they turn your heart toward God, establishing (or strengthening) your faith in your Creator, creating within you (or stirring up) a desire to worship and obey Him.

## IS THERE A LINE AT THE BANANA TREE?

We do it (or did it) at school. We do it at the store, the bank, the doctor's office, the ball game or the amusement park. We would hate to know the grand total of the time we have spent doing it. What am I talking about? Waiting in line.

Why do we wait in line and expect others to do so? Is there a country in the world where "cutting in line" would be considered acceptable? Is "cutting in line" wrong because there are national, state, or local laws against it? No. Man conducts himself according to a universal sense of proper behavior.

Where did man's sense of moral "law" come from? Evolution? Have you ever seen pigs at the trough waiting in line? Or even monkeys (man's nearest relative?) standing in line for bananas from

the zoo keeper? If Evolution be true, at some point one monkey must have decided he "ought" to let the monkey who got to the banana tree ahead of him go first. This creature who, prior to that time lived by selfish instinct, began living by a moral code of what it "ought" and "ought not" to do. And, just why would it do that?

Isn't it far more logical to believe that our sense of moral law came from a Moral Being who created him in His image? (Genesis 1:26).

The next time you are annoyed when standing in line, think of how the line argues for the existence of God and remember and be thankful for the moral order that he has placed among men. Think of trying to buy your bananas without it!

## MORE STUDY OF EVIDENCES?

A sign I saw in front of a church building read, "Faith closes its eyes to reason". We do not believe that. Faith is based on reason. In the N.T., converts to Christianity were made through someone reasoning with them through the presentation of evidence. The hearers then weighed the evidence and were persuaded to believe in Jesus (Acts 17:1-4).

We would like to offer you more opportunities to study the evidence that there is a God, that the Bible is the Word of God, and that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. The following are available:

**"Evidences For Faith":** A 10 lesson course we will present to you in your home or you may complete at home and then mail to us for grading)

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### Sermon Tapes On Evidences:

"Dinosaurs, the Bible and Evolution"

"Egypt in Prophecy"

"Jesus is the King"

Let us hear from you if we can assist you in laying a foundation for your faith or in strengthening the faith which you already have - **(734) 942-7956**.

Also, we want you to be aware of our new **Website: [prchurchofchrist.org](http://prchurchofchrist.org)** where you will find other studies available as well as the opportunity to e-mail us.

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**Volume 1**

**Nov, 2001**

**No 5**

## **IF THERE IS A GOD, WHY?: GOD GAVE MAN CHOICE**

September 11. If there is a God, why? Why the sudden tragic end of thousands of innocent lives in Pennsylvania, New York City, and Washington D.C.? Nearly the whole world has condemned the actions of the terrorists and the war against them has been labeled a war that is "Good vs. Evil".

When we think of God, words such as "Almighty" (All- Powerful) and "Sovereign" (Ruling with Supreme Authority) come to mind. When such horrific evil is seen such as on September 11, unbelievers may become more rooted in their unbelief and believers may be filled with doubts, both asking, "If there is a God, why do such evil things happen? Why would He not exert His Power and Authority to prevent them? However the tragedies of September 11 have affected your thoughts of God, won't you examine the Bible answer to this important question?

First, we need to reword our question, to broaden its scope to include all who do "evil" in the sight of God. Paul wrote, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23). All men have broken the law of God, some men more than others and some with more damaging consequences to their fellow man. Nevertheless, all men are contributors to a world of moral evil.

We therefore should not be made to wonder about the control of God only in the face of horrific crimes. The question should not be, "Why does God allow a few terrorists to go on a killing rampage, but why is all mankind allowed to do evil if God exists? I must look in the mirror and ask, "Why am I allowed to do evil, if God exists?" "Where is God's control over me?"

The answer is found in God's creation of man. When God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, He told them they could eat of every tree but one, the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:15-17). We conclude that God made man a creature of choice. He did not make man a computerized robot, programmed to do his will. Had He done so, man would not have been able to do evil, but would have lived totally righteous under God's total control. But, by the way God made man, He chose to give up some "control" and so evil became a possibility.

God has placed man in a "controlled struggle" to see whether or not he will choose to obey Him. Though God Himself does not tempt man (Jas 1:13), He allows Satan to tempt man (Gen 3:1-5), and has given Satan three avenues by which to lure man; the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 Jn 2:15-17). God has made men vulnerable, susceptible to sin, creatures that will sin unless they fight against temptation.

However, God is in charge and regulates the process. Satan must have God's permission to tempt (Lk 22:31-32) and God controls the extent of the temptation so that man is not tempted above what he can bear (1 Cor 10:13). Thus, man is not forced to sin and cannot blame God, but only himself if he does sin (Jas 1:13-15). So, the horrendous acts of September 11 and all other sins are the result of man's lack of control and not God's and do not cast doubts on His Power and His Authority...

(Continued on the back page)

Remember our website: [www.prchurchofchrist.org](http://www.prchurchofchrist.org)

## IF THERE IS A GOD, WHY?: CONTROL THROUGH ACCOUNTABILITY

...Though God has allowed man to sin, He has maintained control over him through accountability. All the terrorists connected with September 11 may never be brought by man to justice, but one day, each one of them, as each man who has ever lived, must "give account of himself to God", and be "recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." (Rom 14:12; 2 Cor 5:10)

Adam and Eve were allowed to rebel against God's commandments, but they paid dearly (Gen 3:16-19, 22-24). God did not stand in the way of Cain killing Abel, but Cain suffered the consequences of his sin the rest of his life (Gen 4:10-12). When the world became evil, God brought the Flood (Gen 6:5-7), fully separating the good from the evil.

However, after the Flood, God promised that while the earth remained, He would not interrupt the natural order of things again by a worldwide judgment (Gen 8:20-22). However, since the Flood, God has intervened to punish individuals (e.g. Nadab and Abihu- Lev 10:1-3), cities (e.g. Sodom and Gomorrah- Gen 19:23-28), and nations (e.g. Babylon- Isa 13).

But, God's judgment has not always been immediate. So man has wondered if God is in control. Does He see what is going on and, if so, is He going to do anything about it? God's reply has been that He will arise from His "short nap" and destroy the sinner (Ps 73, esp vs. 17-20). He has a "book of remembrance" and He will distinguish between the wicked and the righteous (Mal 3:13-4:3).

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As a farmer lets the wheat and the weeds grow together until harvest and then separates them, so God allows the wicked and the righteous to live in this world together until His appointed time of judgment. Then the righteous will receive eternal blessings, while the wicked will be sent to eternal torment (Mt 13:24-30, 36-43). The judgments which God has already sent should more than convince us that all men are accountable and on that great Judgment Day will face the consequences of their actions (see 2 Pet 2:3-9, Jude 5-7).

God planned before He made the world to have sons who would choose to be conformed to the image of His Son. These would not be righteous by their own actions, as they, as all men, would do evil. But, they would accept the call of the gospel and be justified (counted "righteous") by the blood of His Son. They would choose to become sons of God and grow to become like His Son, that by His grace, mercy, and love, they might be glorified rather than condemned at the Day of Judgment (Rom 8:29,30). These sons of God would be to the "*praise of His glory*" (Eph 1:12,14). This could not be said of them if God had made them robots with no choice between good and evil and no struggle to do good, rather than evil.

In the face of the evil of September 11, and in the face of our own evil, let us lay aside all skepticism and doubt. God exists. He is Almighty. He is Sovereign. He is Just. The terrorists will give account to Him. So will we. Are we His sons? Are we living to His praise or to our condemnation?

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**Volume 1** **December, 2001** **No 6**

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## DENOMINATIONALISM: A SCHEME OF THE DEVIL

(Scene: Somewhere in heaven late in the first century; we find a meeting between Satan and two of his angels)

**Satan:** I have called you here today on most urgent business. Despite the persecution we have been stirring up, Christians continue to spread the gospel (Acts 8:4). Far too many people are being converted to Jesus. Men and women are crucifying self and allowing Christ to live in them (Gal 2:20). In their respective congregations, they are following the doctrine of Christ as their only guide (2 Jn 9). Therefore, there is a great unity among believers, a unity which will do nothing but cause the world to believe God did send Jesus (Jn 17:21). Something must be done or Christianity will spread further. What can we do to stop it?

**First Angel:** I suggest that we double our efforts to undermine the foundation of Christianity, that Jesus is the Christ (King), the Son of God.

**Second Angel:** That would be great, if it would work. Indeed, we have deceived many of the Jews in this way, but we have been hard pressed to fool others in light of the eyewitness testimony of the apostles, the miracles the Christians have been performing, and the convincing arguments they are making from O.T. prophecy. We need another plan.

**Satan:** There is a better way! We don't have to cause men to totally reject the idea that Jesus is King for them to be ours. We must make them think Jesus is their King, while in fact they are not living their lives in subjection to His rule. We must develop a false "Christianity" where Jesus is professed and denied all at once.

**Second Angel:** Why not deceive men into thinking that certain Christians have authority over the rest of the Christians, that all authority has not been given to Jesus (Mt 28:18). If we can convince them of this, they will stop following Jesus' word and will follow men into numerous errors, all in Jesus' name (Acts 20:28-32, 1 Tim 4:1-3).

**First Angel:** And, Satan, we could label the men with this authority "clergy" and those without it "laity" and dress the "clergy" in robes and let men call them "Father" or "Reverend" to further exalt them and to condition men to look to them as authorities. We could have the "clergy" preach that they were the only ones who could understand the Scriptures. This would keep the "laity" from studying and therefore insure that they would blindly follow men rather than Jesus.

**Satan:** Splendid! You both are of tremendous help! And, once we establish that the "clergy" have authority, we will have them meet in councils and then publish their decisions and decrees as creedbooks which men will follow instead of the gospel of Christ.

**First Angel:** Yes, but we must not let them think that they have created different doctrines. Let us cause them to believe and also convince the "laity" that they are merely condensing the doctrine of Christ so that men may more clearly understand what they should be for and what they should be against.

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**Second Angel:** Very clever! Once it is accepted that men may draw up creeds, many will do so. These books of men will, of course, be contradictory and all the "Christians" will be divided into various organizations on the basis of the creed which they accept. Infidels will laugh as they see so many conflicting doctrines all supposedly coming from one Book.

**Satan:** I'm already way ahead of you. When men wake up to their divided condition, there will be so many confusing ways that I will teach them to just admit that men cannot see the Bible alike. I'll get them to believe that since all can't agree, all are alright, as long as they "believe" in Jesus and are sincere. Therefore, they must just "love" and accept one another. If anyone comes along teaching the doctrine of Christ, exposing error and refusing to accept those who teach it, I'll have him looked at as a self-righteous fanatic. I'll suggest to those in error that they just quote (pervertedly of course) "Judge not that ye be not judged" (Mt 7:1) to him and just ignore what he has to say from the Scriptures.

**Second Angel:** Satan, you are most brilliant! If we execute this plan to perfection, a "Christianity" far removed from what Jesus established will be set in place. This counterfeit will be all most men ever know. Men will be following men instead of Jesus, professed "believers" will all be divided, and to top it all off, any true Christian will be looked at as an overzealous nut!

**Satan:** I thank both of you for your help in formulating this plan. With it we will deceive and damn millions of ignorant souls. Let us go forth and find men through whom we can work our plan.

AND THE REST IS HISTORY!!

P.S. The Palmer Road church of Christ is simply a group of believers who call ourselves nothing but "Christians" and meet together to worship and work under the direction of Christ. We reject the idea that anyone but Jesus has authority in heaven and on earth (Mt 28:18) and therefore reject the creeds of men and the denominations which have been formed based upon them. We believe that denomination-ism is the work of Satan and not the Lord.

We do not set ourselves up as the standard, but urge all believers and congregations to do as the Christians we read about in the N.T., to submit themselves to the will of Christ (Gal 2:20) as expressed in His doctrine (2 Jn 9). Only by doing so will Christians be one as the Father and Son are one and be able to convince the world to believe (Jn 17:20-21).

Please call us at (734) 942-7956 or e-mail us at our website [prchurchofchrist.org](http://prchurchofchrist.org) to discuss how that you can avoid or escape from the Devil's counterfeit "Christianity" which gives lipservice to Jesus' Kingship and actually live and worship with Jesus as your King.

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## IF THERE IS A GOD, WHY?: GOD GAVE MAN CHOICE

September 11. If there is a God, why? Why the sudden tragic end of thousands of innocent lives in Pennsylvania, New York City, and Washington D.C.? Nearly the whole world has condemned the actions of the terrorists and the war against them has been labeled a war that is "Good vs. Evil".

When we think of God, words such as "Almighty" (All- Powerful) and "Sovereign" (Ruling with Supreme Authority) come to mind. When such horrific evil is seen such as on September 11, unbelievers may become more rooted in their unbelief and believers may be filled with doubts, both asking, "If there is a God, why do such evil things happen? Why would He not exert His Power and Authority to prevent them? However the tragedies of September 11 have affected your thoughts of God, won't you examine the Bible answer to this important question?

First, we need to reword our question, to broaden its scope to include all who do "evil" in the sight of God. Paul wrote, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23). All men have broken the law of God, some men more than others and some with more damaging consequences to their fellow man. Nevertheless, all men are contributors to a world of moral evil.

We therefore should not be made to wonder about the control of God only in the face of horrific crimes. The question should not be, "Why does God allow a few terrorists to go on a killing rampage, but why is all mankind allowed to do evil if God exists? I must look in the mirror and ask, "Why am I allowed to do evil, if God exists?" "Where is God's control over me?"

The answer is found in God's creation of man. When God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, He told them they could eat of every tree but one, the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:15-17). We conclude that God made man a creature of choice. He did not make man a computerized robot, programmed to do his will. Had He done so, man would not have been able to do evil, but would have lived totally righteous under God's total control. But, by the way God made man, He chose to give up some "control" and so evil became a possibility.

God has placed man in a "controlled struggle" to see whether or not he will choose to obey Him. Though God Himself does not tempt man (Jas 1:13), He allows Satan to tempt man (Gen 3:1-5), and has given Satan three avenues by which to lure man; the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (1 Jn 2:15-17). God has made men vulnerable, susceptible to sin, creatures that will sin unless they fight against temptation.

However, God is in charge and regulates the process. Satan must have God's permission to tempt (Lk 22:31-32) and God controls the extent of the temptation so that man is not tempted above what he can bear (1 Cor 10:13). Thus, man is not forced to sin and cannot blame God, but only himself if he does sin (Jas 1:13-15). So, the horrendous acts of September 11 and all other sins are the result of man's lack of control and not God's and do not cast doubts on His Power and His Authority...

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Remember our website: [www.prchurchofchrist.org](http://www.prchurchofchrist.org)

## IF THERE IS A GOD, WHY?: CONTROL THROUGH ACCOUNTABILITY

...Though God has allowed man to sin, He has maintained control over him through accountability. All the terrorists connected with September 11 may never be brought by man to justice, but one day, each one of them, as each man who has ever lived, must "give account of himself to God", and be "recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." (Rom 14:12; 2 Cor 5:10)

Adam and Eve were allowed to rebel against God's commandments, but they paid dearly (Gen 3:16-19, 22-24). God did not stand in the way of Cain killing Abel, but Cain suffered the consequences of his sin the rest of his life (Gen 4:10-12). When the world became evil, God brought the Flood (Gen 6:5-7), fully separating the good from the evil.

However, after the Flood, God promised that while the earth remained, He would not interrupt the natural order of things again by a worldwide judgment (Gen 8:20-22). However, since the Flood, God has intervened to punish individuals (e.g. Nadab and Abihu- Lev 10:1-3), cities (e.g. Sodom and Gomorrah- Gen 19:23-28), and nations (e.g. Babylon- Isa 13).

But, God's judgment has not always been immediate. So man has wondered if God is in control. Does He see what is going on and, if so, is He going to do anything about it? God's reply has been that He will arise from His "short nap" and destroy the sinner (Ps 73, esp vs. 17-20). He has a "book of remembrance" and He will distinguish between the wicked and the righteous (Mal 3:13-4:3).

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As a farmer lets the wheat and the weeds grow together until harvest and then separates them, so God allows the wicked and the righteous to live in this world together until His appointed time of judgment. Then the righteous will receive eternal blessings, while the wicked will be sent to eternal torment (Mt 13:24-30, 36-43). The judgments which God has already sent should more than convince us that all men are accountable and on that great Judgment Day will face the consequences of their actions (see 2 Pet 2:3-9, Jude 5-7).

God planned before He made the world to have sons who would choose to be conformed to the image of His Son. These would not be righteous by their own actions, as they, as all men, would do evil. But, they would accept the call of the gospel and be justified (counted "righteous") by the blood of His Son. They would choose to become sons of God and grow to become like His Son, that by His grace, mercy, and love, they might be glorified rather than condemned at the Day of Judgment (Rom 8:29,30). These sons of God would be to the "*praise of His glory*" (Eph 1:12,14). This could not be said of them if God had made them robots with no choice between good and evil and no struggle to do good, rather than evil.

In the face of the evil of September 11, and in the face of our own evil, let us lay aside all skepticism and doubt. God exists. He is Almighty. He is Sovereign. He is Just. The terrorists will give account to Him. So will we. Are we His sons? Are we living to His praise or to our condemnation?