

# Preserving the Environment

or, *Intellectual Relativism in Religion*

by David Crawford

"Where there is no vision (revelation) the people perish" (Proverbs 29:18). Without word from God we are like abandoned children, sure to die if no one finds us (Jeremiah 10:23). The figure Amos uses to make this point is that of famine (Amos 8:11f.): "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for wafer, but of hearing the words of the Lord. And they shall run from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east; they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, and shall not find it." To be without word from God would mean starvation. It's that simple. And that scary.

It's even scary in spite of the fact that we do have the word of God. Considering the poor attitudes that often attach to the word of God we are in danger still. Moses, knowing that many would try to excuse themselves from any obligation to the word he delivered to Israel, wrote; "[T]his commandment. . . is not too difficult for you, nor is it out of reach. It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will go up to heaven for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?' Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will cross the sea for us to get it for us and make us hear it, that we may observe it?' but the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may observe it" (Deuteronomy 30:11-14).

So, if deprived of the word men would run frantically searching for it; and having it they often run frantically from it using any excuse imaginable to justify our departure from the word of God. But the word is all too accessible and, especially in view of its primacy, we should gladly embrace it. It was primary to Christ (John 17:8). It was, therefore, primary to his apostles (John 17:6; 6:68). Both He and they emphasized the importance of the word to would-be followers (e.g. John 8:31). It is our habitation of life. One writer said that "as air to the bird and water to the fish, so the word is the environment in which the disciple lives, out of which he dies."

This environment is quite fragile, at least inasmuch as it becomes quite poisonous if mixed with foreign materials. Just as the physical environment is threatened by such things as acid rain, smog, and toxic waste, so the word is threatened seemingly more than ever from every quarter — even the religious flank. In spite of this, and precisely because of it, we must be more devoted than ever to preserving the environment of the unadulterated word (II Corinthians 4:2). Paul's timely appeal to Timothy. in II Timothy 4:2 becomes a timeless appeal for all who want to breathe the pure air of heaven on earth — the word of God. Consider that:

What is right is in the word. Scripture calls it the truth, even the word of truth (e.g. II Timothy 2:15). If there was ever a time when people needed a standard by which to determine and measure truth, and a motivation to do just that if such a standard is available, it is now. This seems to me to be the decade of the question mark. No one is sure about anything but that we are unsure about everything. And for such a time, the Bible, a book of periods and even exclamation

points, is needed more than ever. In our open-minded society we are increasingly coming to one conclusion about moral, ethical, and spiritual issues — that there are no conclusions. This is mirrored in almost every media channel, especially the talk-shows where questions of critical significance are raised but never settled.

We are reaping the bitter fruits of intellectual/moral relativism. The Maharani of Jaipur once warned of the dangers of intellectual relativism by saying: "Keep an open mind. An open mind is a very good thing. But don't keep your mind so open that your brains fall out." Intellectual relativism, then, simply means never making up your mind about anything. On the heels of this follows moral relativism which simply means that what is moral/immoral "relates" to or depends on the at-present state of the gut of the individual attempting to make such a decision! Inconsistencies and absurdities abound as the fruits of such foolishness. Consider that to say homosexuality is wrong is a "value judgment" while to O. K. it is "open-mindedness." The latter is as much a value judgment as the former. How about the legislature forbidding prayer in school after opening their sessions with prayer! Unfortunately I could go on, but I won't. But it only gets worse. There are those who practice what the intellectuals preach — open immorality and godlessness. Then the proponents of no-absolute-values-doctrine have the audacity to look down their noses at these individuals.

The seeds of this were condemned long ago when men and women sought to establish right on their own, apart from the word of God (Judges 17:6). But, having "forsaken the right way" (1 Peter 2:15) they sooner or later found their way to be "the way of death" (Proverbs 14:12). The alternative should be obvious. Since our God is a God of what is right (Genesis 18:25; Deuteronomy 32:4) all His ways are right (Hosea 14:9). His ways are communicated to us that we may know of them and honor them (Isaiah 2:3). They themselves are right (Psalms 119:128) and make us happy in that we avoid the pitfalls of spiritual darkness (Psalms 19:8,11). But know this; that the inevitable by-product of doing what is right is difficulty and hardship (1 Timothy 4:5). As young people have noted through the years, "it is not easy to do what is right." But rather than believe and practice a convenient lie to the damnation of our souls we preach and obey the often-times inconvenient truth, paying the high price for truth and refusing to sell it at any cost knowing our spiritual birthright would be part of the sale (Proverbs 23:23).

What is good is in the word. Scripture calls it the gospel, which comes to us through the preached word (I Thessalonians 1:5; 1 Corinthians 1:18). Long ago the Proverb writer had said, "Like cold water to a weary soul, So is good news from a distant land" (25:25). Jesus came, the gospel tells us, "To shine upon those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, To guide our feet into the way of peace" (Luke 1:79). This good news is born out of bad news, which, as always, makes the good news even better. Before one accepts and believes the gospel then responds to it he/she is dead in sin (Ephesians 2:1). To die having not obeyed the gospel means to see Jesus at the last day "revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus" (II Thessalonians 1:7-8) Bad news? An understated description, to say the least. To be made alive again and then spared this final doom, enjoying eternity with Jesus and all the saints of God's good news" becomes an understated description.

Since the gospel is first and foremost "that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and ...was buried, and ...raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (I Corinthians 15:1-5) one must accept these facts. But such is not the full extent of "obeying the gospel. "How can you obey these facts?" one might ask. Well, Paul said that one "obeys from the heart [a] form of [this] teaching" (Romans 6:17). And at the same opening Paul specifies that the form of death, burial, and resurrection of Christ that we can and must obey is baptism-immersion in water (6:3-f). This is the same good news that came to those described in I Corinthians 6:9-11 as worthy of Hell, but to whom the good news came, sparing them. Paul himself reveled in this good news in eloquent tones (I Timothy 1:8-17). In fact, it was the good news that generated and sustained the confidence that gives the fragrant aroma to the very chapter from which our text comes. May we breath the same air at our death.

What is forever is in the word. Scripture calls it the word of the Lord [which] abides forever (I Peter 1:25). Whether you look at the movies that are now popular, the emergence of the new age movement, or the interest in "near death experiences," the message is the same--we are a people groping for the bridge that connects us to what is forever. It doesn't matter if we have but a "thread of hope;" we will do a tight-walk on it if it will take us into the land of forever. But only the word of God is sufficient for such a task. Jesus said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words shall not pass away" (Matthew 24:35). The "exact sciences" that many hoped would transport them into forever have only disappointed. The "scientific" revelations of Darwin, Freud, and countless others who "prophesied" have fallen into obsolescence. Are we so arrogant as to think that the knowledge of our own day will do significantly better!? Let us for right, for good, forever, preach the word.