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This World's Wisdom
Spring 2004

Thank You!

I usually begin our newsletter with my commentary, but I have to say that it is more appropriate that I thank all of you who contributed so generously to our support during the last quarter and first quarter of this year. We purchased our DVD equipment and have made six sets of DVDs so far this year. These are complete sets of our counseling series with a CD of our study guides. We have placed three sets in two seminaries and a Bible college in India, and one set in the library at the Carolina Evangelical Divinity School where I teach. We will be putting another in South Africa, and as soon as I can arrange it, one in the Duke Medical Library. We have two sales of complete sets pending. We have other places to put some, but have not made arrangements to do so. I am so grateful that you responded to our needs.

In his letter to the Corinthians Paul talks about the lostness of mankind and in his discourse he makes the statement that this world's wisdom is foolishness. I do not know of any place where this is more apparent than in academic theology. I have read theological treatises before, but I recently came upon a book that illustrated some of the world's foolishness in bold perspective. This is how it came to my attention.

There is a bookstore in an outlet mall on I-95 outside of Savannah, Georgia. It deals primarily in new books that have been discontinued by the publishers. They are quite cheap. I saw none over \$5.00. The surprising thing about the store is that it has a great collection of Christian books. The first time I went there I stumbled across a book on prayer by Friedrich Heiler that I had longed to own, but had not found either used or new. Lo and behold there was a single new copy in the store, so I bought it. On my second visit there were none that I really wanted at first glance, but I did see one that I thought might be interesting so I bought it. I have wondered for years about Jesus' use of the term Kingdom of God, but have read little on the subject. The title of the book I found is *The Kingdom of God in the Teachings of Jesus* (Word, 1997). The author, Mark Saucy, is a graduate of Fuller Seminary, a school that is considered evangelical. As a scholarly work this book is a gem. The author has critically reviewed almost every work that has been written in recent years on the subject of the Kingdom of God. Interestingly, the first 300 pages are devoted to these works. He divides the theological themes of these writings from the standpoints of eschatological and

hermeneutical views. He also reviews the non-apocalyptic and apocalyptic writings. The "new hermeneutic" receives considerable attention as does "historical criticism." One of the more interesting features of the book is his commentary on the historical critical work of Eta Linneamann on Jesus' parables. What he does not mention, or did not know, is that Linneamann had a religious experience (she got saved) after she wrote her book and subsequently repudiated her earlier writings. Her repudiation was a polemic against the entire subject of historical criticism. The Apostle Paul observed that one cannot understand spiritual things if one does not have the Spirit of God dwelling in them (1 Cor. 2:14). Quite obviously Linneamann's spiritual eyes were opened and she could see the foolishness of her previous theological (religious) writings.

As I read this book I was appalled at the way many of the theologians, and especially the German school, have denied the divinity of Christ. They have evaluated His teachings on the Kingdom of God from a human point of view. They have said that his statements concerning the Kingdom were influenced by his culture, and that he thought like an ordinary human. Since Jesus was God I do not believe that he thought like an ordinary or even a religious human. Although he spoke in human terms, he spoke so the people could understand him. I am convinced that much of what has been written by speculative theologians who have looked at his ministry through the secular eyes of linguistics, philosophy, sociology, and psychology has to be ignored.

Two authors that we really should ignore are Bultmann and Fuchs (they were Linneamann's teachers) who even denied the veracity of scripture. They did not believe that Jesus said the things that are recorded in the gospels. They rejected His statement that the Holy Spirit reminds us of the things he taught.

Before I go on I want to emphasize that there are theologians who have written on the Bible guided and directed by the Spirit. They interpret Jesus' teachings in truth. They believe that Jesus is the Son of God and that the scriptures are inspired by God to reveal him as he really is. Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would speak about him and will remind us of all he taught us (John 14:26), and will guide us into all truth (John 16:13). And these theologians believed him. I also want to emphasize the fact that the Holy Spirit not only guides and directs truly Christian theologians, but he works in all real believers in the same way.

Saucy presents his own views at the end of the book and there is clarity in what he says. He believes that Jesus spoke of the Kingdom of God as being present now and in the future. The Kingdom of God exists in those of us who have the Holy Spirit, but will come in all its fullness when Jesus returns. Until then, when we come together in the church, we are expected to be a microcosm of the Kingdom as it will be.

I am glad I found this book for it confirms what I conclude from my reading of the scriptures. I hold a view of the Kingdom that is compatible with the evangelical view as stated by Saucy, and believe that the church should be an example of what the coming full Kingdom should be. There is a problem, though, the problem is that the church has people in it, and that spoils everything.

People are imperfect so they sin. To illustrate how pervasive sin is in the church I will cite the example of my observations at a recent meeting I attended. It was a meeting of pastors and persons in fulltime ministry, and as I listened to the participants introduce themselves one thing stood out — many of them were prideful. Those who were took center stage and recounted all of their achievements in great detail. Although they were given an allotted time in which to speak they continued to go over their time limit until the organizer finally had to use a timer. The King James Version of the Bible calls such discourses vainglory and it seemed to me that the word described some of them perfectly. I have to admit that I had been tempted to do the same, but the Holy Spirit restrained me. My human nature wanted them to know that I had done "great things." Then that same night the Lord woke me at 2:00 a.m. with pride on my mind. I lay awake for over an hour while the Holy Spirit reminded me that Jesus was humble, and he condemned pride. In one discourse He described the Pharisees standing on the street corner with long fringes on their garments, with phylacteries on their arms and foreheads, praying loud sonorous prayers. He commented that they had received their reward. They were pridefully trying to impress men and had succeeded. On the other hand, a tax collector pleaded with God to have mercy on him, a sinner, and God heard his prayers because of his contrition. A humble and contrite heart is what the Lord wants of us. I knew from His reminder that I, too, had pride and it had to be dealt with.

I believe that in the past I have written about the seven deadly sins and said that pride is the mother of all sin. When Pope Gregory the Great listed the seven deadly sins he listed pride first. Bill Backus, in his PhD thesis at the University of Minnesota, said that it is the queen of all sins and gives birth to the other six. He even developed a sin scale to measure how sinful we are. I do not know of anyone who regularly uses his scale, but it seemed like such a good idea that I tried it out on some of my patients, and they all scored in the sinful area. No one was without sin. When I took it I found that I was quite sinful, too. The Bible is right when it says that we all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

Pride is inherent in us all. Satan knew this when he tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden. It constitutes a stronghold that he continues to exploit throughout history. I am sure that is why these clergy who were at the meeting had fallen into his trap. They had done things that were beyond the achievements of most of their fellows, so they presented their accomplishments as if it was by their efforts they had been successful. They forgot that the Holy Spirit's power made their success possible. They did not heed Paul's admonition, "If anyone wants to boast let him boast of what the Lord has done" (1 Cor. 1:31 TEV). They did not give God the

credit due him. Since we have an inherent desire to be important, it is easy to mistakenly attribute our success to our efforts. God does not like prideful persons. His reason is clear for they, like Lucifer (Satan), want to exalt themselves and be like God. This is the basis for humanism, a philosophy that Satan is promoting by appealing to the unregenerate. It is the philosophy of the academic world. It has profoundly influenced the faculties of undergraduate, graduate liberal arts, medical, theology, and law schools. The result is that these faculty members try to outdo their peers. It is only logical that they should do so since they are judged on their productivity. As a result they compete among themselves mercilessly. In the process they fall further into sin by being envious. When I was a resident I presented a paper at a meeting of the American Psychiatric Association. It was groundbreaking research, but others had been doing the same work. One of them was asked to discuss my paper. He attacked me viciously intimating that since I was a resident I did not know what I was talking about. Everyone in the room knew he was angry because I was going to beat him into print. He was envious.

To further illustrate how pride leads to sin I can recount some clinical experiences I had early in my Christian walk. I had a friend who has since gone to be with the Lord, who kept referring pastors to me who had been sexually indiscrete and had been caught. It was in the days of knit suits and flattop haircuts that these men came. It did not surprise me that they were there because statistics show that between 17-35% of pastors commit adultery. It was amusing to me that those who were referred came dressed in a stereotypical manner with double breasted knit suits, patent leather loafers with gold chains on them, and their hair cut with a flattop, blow dried and sprayed. They were in their way dressed like the Pharisees that Jesus described. After introducing ourselves and exchanging pleasantries, I asked them why they were consulting me. They invariably began by telling me how successful they had been with their church. They frequently had either/or completed a building program, had increased the numbers of their congregations, and had been very successful in increasing their Sunday school attendance. After we had dispensed with their prideful remarks, I would ask them why they were really there. I reminded them that people do not consult psychiatrists because of their success, but because of their failures. Then came the usual statement that they had a "moment (sometimes lasting a year or longer) of weakness" and had fallen into sin with a parishioner, their secretary or the choir director. Proverbs 11:2 says that, "When pride comes, then comes disgrace." These men were classical examples of that process.

I don't think there is any doubt that pride leads to sin. A prideful person creates his own value system because he lives according to his human nature and what the human nature does is quite plain. It leads him into all kinds of sin (Galatians 5:19-21). If he is unregenerate he will not be able to keep from sinning no matter how hard he struggles. He becomes morally paralyzed and continues to sin in spite of his efforts to stop. Disgrace follows soon thereafter. The wages of sin are still death and have not been deflated or inflated. Not only will the sinner suffer,

but those closest to him will also suffer. If you don't believe me sit in my office for a few days and you will discover what sin does in the lives of those who live or have lived with the sinner. God has, though, given us a way out. Both the sinner and those who have been affected by the sinner can find Christ if necessary, repent, believe and be healed.

The opposite personality characteristic of pride is humility. One of the men who spoke with humility said that he had been raised in a horribly dysfunctional home. His father had been an alcoholic and had left them early in his life. His mother who ran the local brothel in his home town then married a succession of four more alcoholics. Fortunately, at the age of 14 he found Jesus at a revival and was adopted by a church who lovingly fathered and mothered him. He then went on to Bible college under their auspices and while there received a call to the ministry. He finished his education, and God blessed him. He has lived a successful righteous life. His less than three minute witness did not contain one iota of pride. He boasted of what God had done, not what he had done.

At another conference I attended this year one of the speakers proudly said that she had been abused in her childhood more than anyone. She recounted some of the things that had happened to her. I admit it was severe abuse, but I have heard stories on numerous occasions that easily topped hers. As I listened I had the feeling that she subtly took pride in the fact that she had recovered from the distorting effects of that abuse on her personality. The way it was presented made it "brag" not "just facts."

Unfortunately, there are also those who take pride in their life before they were converted. Years ago I was attending a conference for lay witnesses and while we were having a meal together some of the men got to bragging about what rank sinners they were before they got saved. One of them assured us that no one in the group could have drunk as much liquor as he had. One of the other men challenged him, and they had an intense debate trying to convince the other that they were the worst drunk. I think the argument ended in a draw, but I could not help commenting that they really should not look back. Jesus said that a man who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is not fit for the kingdom of heaven (Luke 9:62). I later learned that one of these men eventually had looked back too long and went back to his pagan ways.

Pride also leads to lying. Recently I encountered a young man who was a liar of the first order. I will not tell you what he did, but his actions caused me to seek to know more about lying. I fortunately found a book that covered the subject in detail and another to tell me how to tell whether a person is lying when I talk to them. I read both books with interest and understood for the first time how often I personally lie. Most of us lie. One place where we lie is that we promise to pray for someone and then do not do it. Harry Denman, who was on the Board of Discipleship of the UMC, knew that he would not remember to pray for someone if they asked him. He, therefore, would say, "OK, lets pray right now." If they

were on the street he would kneel with them at the curb and pray. This most often was to the embarrassment of the person who requested prayer. I have to admit that I am not as bold as he was, but if someone asks me to pray for them I usually pray right then. I know that I have the best of intentions, but my motivation poops out if I delay. It is also true that we lie when we worship. Interestingly, one Sunday our pastor told us that we had lied after we sang a song in church. I do not remember what we sang that day, but he was right. I doubt if there was one person in the congregation who was going to do what they promised to do in the song. I know several songs that we sing where we lie. One of them is "I Surrender All" and another is "I Have Decided to Follow Jesus." There is no intent on the part of the average parishioner to do what the songs say, or if they do intend to do it they do not follow through. Both of these songs express things that we ought to do because Jesus asked us to do them, but we don't. We often lie when we recite the Lord's prayer. This is particularly true when we recite the line in the Lord's prayer, "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." Forgiveness is not something that we do to those who trespass against us. Most often we just stuff our anger down and hold it against them. God faithfully keeps his promises, but we rarely do.

Pride motivates materialism. There is no question that many people want to have big luxurious homes with fine furniture and high priced china and silver. Others want the most luxurious cars they can afford and are compelled to trade them almost every year. They wear flashy clothes and alligator skin shoes, or if they belong to a lower class culture they will wear snake skin boots and drive fancy pickups. They are compelled to have their wants met not just their needs. As a result they overspend on their credit cards and are deeply in debt. In our society we have promoted this profligate spending with our consumer culture, and it is enhanced by the apparent affluence of our society so that personal debt is enormous and savings are minimal.

Arrogance is a behavioral manifestation of pride. In the Bible the Israelis were accused of being a stiff necked people. People who are stiff necked are arrogant. It is easy to discern arrogance in a person. They really are stiff necked holding their head high, their chin thrust forward as they stand erect often with their arms crossed. They appear to be haughty or overbearing. One of the best examples of a public figure who was arrogant is General Douglas MacArthur. He apparently enjoyed being pictured in profile with this chin thrust forward and a corncob pipe in his mouth. In this pose he was the picture of arrogant determination. His behavior reflected his arrogance. You may or may not remember that he challenged President Truman over a decision the president made and was fired for his arrogance. God said, "I hate pride and arrogance, evil behavior and perverse speech" (Proverbs 8:13). Jesus condemned arrogance. When the Pharisees criticized His disciples for not washing their hands before they ate He responded by accusing them of hypocrisy. He ended his discussion by saying that spiritual uncleanness does not come from a dirty body, but it comes out of a man's heart. "For from within, out of men's hearts come evil thoughts, sexual

immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, ARROGANCE and folly. All these come from inside and make a man unclean" (Mark 7:20-23). The consequences of arrogance are not good for God has said, "A man who remains stiff-necked after many rebukes will suddenly be destroyed — without remedy"(Proverbs 29:1).

As I have noted above, humility is the antonym for pride. God loves a man with a humble and contrite heart. But what is real humility? Interestingly, the world defines humility in a negative way as not being arrogant or prideful. Others think of it as reflecting, expressing or offering a spirit of deference or submission. I am convinced that the latter definition comes closest to being what God approves of. In Isaiah he said, "This is the one I esteem, He who is humble and contrite in Spirit and who trembles at my word" (Isa. 66:2b). From these words it appears that God expects us to have a spirit of deference to Him, but he also does not want us to have a foot-in-the-mud attitude. We are His children and he regards us as a father sees his beloved children. He knows we have vices, imperfections and liabilities, but he also knows we have virtues, perfections and assets. He desires, as any loving father does, to treasure our positive qualities, and to correct our negative ones. When we have submitted ourselves to Him, He continues to rebuke, correct and train us in righteousness throughout our lives. The motivation for this essay testifies to that process. Even though I am 81 years old, God woke me and put the subject of pride on my mind as an example of his concern for me and others. He knew I needed to know more about the subject for I encounter pride in my practice all the time. I also have a grandson who is in rebellion and is unwilling to swallow his pride and submit himself again to the Lord, and he is not alone; I too have a tendency to be prideful.

Several years ago my grandson gave his life to the Lord and was really enthusiastic about his faith. He then got a job, fell into bad company, bought a car and it was all downhill after that. The Bible says that bad company corrupts good character, and he exemplifies that statement's truth. I recently took it upon myself to talk to him about the way his life is going. I told him that he is pursuing a self-destructive course and the time had come to repent and recommit his life to the Lord. He told me point blank and without rancor that he was not ready to do it. His pride forces him to believe that he is going to live his life as he wants to live it. He is not willing to resubmit to the lordship of Christ. I did not feel discouraged when he rejected my advice because I delivered the message that the Lord wanted me to deliver. He now knows what he has to do, and when a crisis arises in his life that he can no longer handle, he knows what to do. Our prayers for him will keep him protected, and God will eventually convict him of his sinfulness. When that happens he will have the wherewithal to make a change to righteousness. Recently he has decided to enlist in the Navy, so the change may come sooner rather than later.

God wants us to have a spirit of deference to him. Deference means obeisance and what he wants is that we be obedient. What He wants us to do is to put our

desires aside and love God with all our being, to love our neighbors, to love ourselves, and to love other Christians as he has loved us. Then He wants us to go into all the world and make disciples. Finally, He adds a social dimension to his commandments when he tells us to feed the hungry, give water to the thirsty, clothe the naked, visit the sick and prisoners, and take strangers in our homes. It is imperative that we heed the words of Jesus' mother to the servants in the courtyard at Cana, where he was attending a wedding. She told them, "Do whatever he tells you to do." He later said, "If you love me you will obey my commandments, and I and the Father will come and live with you and in you." When we do our water will turn to fine wine, we will have laid up treasures in Heaven and will have eternal life.