

Bryan Station Baptist Church

INDEPENDENT

ESTABLISHED 1786

MISSIONARY

THE PIONEER BAPTIST

"Preaching The Same Truth We Preached Before Kentucky Was A State"

Vol. 1

Lexington, Kentucky

September 1970

No. 12

STREAMLINING CHRISTIANITY

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"Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on Him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God" (John 12:42, 43).

We are living in a day of streamlining. In the physical realm we have streamlined trains, streamlined automobiles, streamlined furniture, streamlined airplanes. Streamlining is in the interest of speed, comfort, and beauty. In the transportation world, streamlining is in the interest of speed primarily; it is a scheme to escape opposition, or to cut down resistance from the wind.

And what we have in the material realm is a sort of parable of what we have in religion. We have streamlining in religion too. And here, too, it is in the interest of speed, comfort and beauty. It is to cut down resistance from the world, provide ease and comfort for the Christian, and to make Christianity attractive to the natural man.



Location: 3.3 miles out Bryan Station Road. Right on Briar Hill Road.

- Sunday School 9:45 a.m.
- Worship Service 11:00 a.m.
- Evening Service 7:00 p.m.
- Wednesday Night Prayer Meeting 7:30 p.m.

Air-Conditioned Nursery Provided

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"Streamline" is one of the new words in our dictionaries, but the principle of streamlining in religion is as old as Christianity itself. In the days of our Lord, by the miracles He performed, the chief rulers were convinced that He was the Messiah, but they kept it to themselves because they were afraid of exclusion from the synagogue. They loved the praise of man more than the praise of God. How foolish and yet how common! "The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth

his trust in the Lord shall be safe" (Proverbs 29:25). They streamlined their faith to escape opposition and persecution. A streamlined Christianity convinces the intellect but does not reach the heart for God.

TRUE CHRISTIANITY WILL ALWAYS MEET WITH OPPOSITION BOTH IN DOCTRINE AND PRACTICE. In teaching and living the offence of the cross will never cease. Our Lord made it plain that His word and His people would meet with opposition from the world. "To be forewarned is to be forearmed." He would not have the world's hatred take His people unawares. He said, "In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer for I have overcome the world." And again, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you." He told them He did not come to bring peace on earth, but a sword. His doctrine would even divide families so that a man's foes would be his own household. And Paul's testimony was to the same effect. He says all who will live goodly in Christ shall suffer persecution.

WHY IS THERE SO LITTLE PERSECUTION TODAY? How are we to account for the comparatively little opposition to Christianity today? It is a fact that there is little opposition as compared to that of the first century and even later. How can we explain it? Is it because the world is better? Is it because human nature has improved? Is it because the carnal mind has ceased to be at enmity with God? Are the doctrines of the Bible more palatable to the natural man? Is God becoming popular with the world? Has Satan surrendered to God? The answer to these questions is so obvious that to ask them is to answer them. Both the Bible and observation, as well as experience, teach us that the world is no better today than when its Creator and Lord walked upon the earth. So we come back to our question. Why is there so little persecution of the Christian religion today? The answer must be that Christianity itself has changed. It has resorted to streamlining methods to escape opposition from the world. I am reminded and am willing to admit that numbers give a certain amount of prestige to religious groups. Certain Baptists have prestige in the south which true Baptists do not enjoy in other parts. And numbers are often the result of streamlining. It remains true that the devil, the flesh and the world are bitter opponents to true Christianity. True religion covers a big part of the earth, but it is spread very thin in most parts.

HOW DO WE STREAMLINE OUR RELIGION?

1. By shunning to declare the whole counsel of God. We may not be able to declare all the counsel in a lifetime, but we can shun to declare it in one sermon. We can avoid scriptures that offend human nature--by toning down the doctrines of human depravity and helplessness and sovereignty of God. What are some of the most hated doctrines of the Bible? Those doctrines that describe God and man.

Man is described as being totally and inherently depraved. This depravity consists of a mind that hates God, a heart that is deceitful and desperately wicked, and a will that clashes with the will of God. Man chooses freely, but his choice is but the exercise of a ruined nature and disposition; hence, it cannot be a good choice. Human nature is bad--insanely bad. Dr. Redpath, the renowned historian, once wrote an article in which he made the claim that all men, without exception, are insane upon something. This is the teaching of the Bible and the Bible goes further and tells us

that the natural man is insane on the subjects of man and God. In the story of the prodigal, the thing that started the boy back home was that he came to himself. And this prodigal is typical of all sinners. Paul says that in conversion God gives us a sound mind. Moreover, the sinner is commanded to repent and repentance is a change of thinking. If the sinner's mind is right, he would not need a change of mind. It is a crazy mind that leads men to reject Christ as Saviour and Lord. It is a crazy mind that leads men to shun God and fight one another. It is a terrible insanity that leads one to oppose the Almighty.

2. Christianity is streamlined when the ministry of rebuke is neglected. "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine" (II Tim. 4:2). "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (II Tim. 3:16). Failure to reprove, where and when it is justified, is to create what some one has called the climate of consent. The failure to rebuke gives comfort to the sinner. It contributes to an easy conscience for the sinner and as long as the sinner's conscience is easy and undisturbed, he will not repent of sin and turn to Christ. In Ezekiel 16:54, the prophet indicts Israel for giving comfort to Sodom. Israel in her backslidden condition led the wicked Sodomites to feel that they were not so bad after all.

There is a ministry of comfort for the godly in sorrow, but there should never be any ministry of comfort for people in sin, unless they repent.

God's man must avoid a "holier-than-thou" spirit which repels the penitent sinner on the one hand, and a false love on the other hand that will make the sinner feel easy while on the broad road that leads to hell. "Open rebuke is better than secret love, Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful" (Prov. 27:5,6). "He that rebuketh a man, afterwards shall find more favour than he that flattereth with the tongue" (Prov. 28:23). God's man must be able to combine the spirit of reproof with the spirit of meekness. He must learn how to rebuke for the good of the sinner and not in order to get something off his chest. "Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear" (I Tim. 5:20).

3. Professing Christians streamline their faith by compromising the Christian life. The world has always hated the good man. "Without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good" (II Tim. 3:3). Puritanism is hateful to the unregenerate. Let the believer walk the straight and narrow path--shun the very appearance of evil--and have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness--and he will be called a crank and a fool. Church members have streamlined on the matters of morals until there is precious little difference between the man of the church and the man of the world. It is so easy to succumb to the world maxim, "If you want to get along, you must go along." The world will interpret our silence as consent.

B. H. Carroll was once riding in a stagecoach when a young man started to tell what was obviously a nutty story. Carroll said, "Wait a minute till I can have the driver stop and get out of the coach if you insist on going on with the story." No climate of consent there! There must be no community of feeling where moral issues

are involved and our feelings must not be muffled so as to give consent.

Can anyone imagine Paul or C. H. Spurgeon indulging in that cheap buffoonery that today passes for fellowship? It is related that the very person of Charles G. Finney in a large factory produced such conviction for sin that the machines had to be stopped so that weeping men could seek the Lord. No climate of consent in his life.

4. Still another way Christianity is being streamlined is by shunning Christ's persecuted and suffering people. A man is known by the company he keeps. Our attitude towards Christ's suffering people reveals our attitude towards Christ. We identify ourselves with the truth of Christ when we succor those who are suffering for the truth.

The chief rulers of our text were streamliners. They knew that Jesus Christ was the Messiah, but they did not want to be identified with His persecuted disciples. They did not want to be excluded from the synagogue. They chose membership in the synagogue to open identity with Christ. They preferred the praise of men to the praise of God. It is a challenging question--it may be an embarrassing question--but we need to face it: Whose company do you prefer? the popular crowd or those who are suffering for the cause of truth?

Streamlining in religion is the refusal to take up our cross and follow Christ. It is an effort to be popular with a world that hated Christ. It is a scheme to be comfortable in a world where Christ had nowhere to lay His head. We have traded the cross for the cushion. The church has degenerated into a social club with a community of feeling in which truth is ignored. We are producing a climate of consent by our backsliding and thus giving comfort to the Sodomites of this world who are headed for judgment.