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STREAMLINING CHRISTIANITY

By: C. D. Cole

"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.

"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 godly 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

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WHOM TO FEAR

By: Dr. C. D. Cole

Introduction: Vance Havner tells us that he thinks the most unappreciated man on earth is a pullman porter on a train who must walk down that mahogany lane in early morning to awaken passengers who are in no mood to be aroused. But this business of arousing people is a thankless job whether it apply to a pullman porter at 2-3-4-6 o'clock in the morning or to the preacher at 11 a.m. and 7:30 p.m. on Sunday. Too many Christians come to church to rest at ease in Zion and you can see written across their faces, as upon a hospital door, the words, Do Not Disturb.

But our hope today is in a disturbing ministry, a ministry that creates the fear of God, and of hell in human hearts, a ministry that arouses people to the danger that confronts them. There is no salvation but in Christ and he means nothing to those who are complacent and at ease and who refuse to think about the day of judgment and the torment of hell.

JAILOR IS CONVERTED

Acts 16:25-31, *"And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them. And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed. And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled. But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here. Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house."* The Lord prepares the heart. The jailor at Philippi was ready for Christ when he asked, *"What must I do to be saved?"*

I am beginning a series of sermons on eternal punishment in the hope that God may bless it to the disturbance and fear of some of you. I cannot hope to make you happy in Christ until I have made you unhappy in your sins. There will not be rejoicing in Christ until you have mourned over your sins.

We are all subject to fear, but our danger is that we fear the wrong thing.

Matthew 10:28, *"And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."*

James 4:12, *"There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?"*

Psalm 85:9, *"Surely his salvation is nigh them that fear him; that glory may dwell in our land."*

Proverbs 29:25, *"The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe."*

Psalm 34:7, *"He gathereth the waters of the sea together as an heap: he layeth up the depth in storehouses."*

Psalm 103:11, *"For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear."*

When Pastor Russell was speaking to a large crowd in denial of eternal punishment a worldly man promised him a liberal donation because he said it made him feel so comfortable to think there is no hell. And when Ingersoll was inveighing against this solemn truth a drunkard staggered to his feet and said, "Make it mighty strong Bob, a lot of us fellows are depending on you." And every lost man vainly hopes there is no hell. But to shut your eyes to the fact is as foolish as for the ostrich to stick his head in the sand and think he is safe.

There is widespread denial of this truth. I have had about as much opposition in preaching this doctrine as any other. You can hardly name a modern sect that does not deny it. Besides such groups as Christian Scientists, Russellites, Seventh Dayists, there are many individuals in the evangelical denominations who boldly and brazenly deny this truth.

There is something to be saved from as well as something to be saved to. There is a hell to shun and a heaven to run into.

Job 36:18, *"Because there is wrath, because lest he take thee away with his stroke: then a great ransom cannot deliver thee."*

Hebrews 9:27, *"And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment."*

Luke 13:3, *"I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish."*

THE NATURE OF MAN

Man is a compound being of three elements or parts. Man has a body and a soul and a spirit. Man has a body that makes human sense conscious; he feels and sees and hears; then he has a soul that makes him self-conscious and a spirit that gives him a capacity for God.

Man is also a dual being when we wish to differentiate between that which is visible and that which is invisible. Christ divided man into two constituent parts when he said, Fear not them which kill the body, etc.

The soul is the principal part of man. Soul is sometimes employed for the whole man or person. Genesis 2:7, *"And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground,*

and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life: and man became a living soul.

Exodus 1:5, *"And all the souls that came out of the loins of Jacob were seventy souls..."*

I Peter 3:20, *"Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved through water."*

Numbers 6:6, *"...he shall come at no dead body."* In the Hebrew word for body is 'nephesh' which means soul. The word 'nephesh' (soul) is translated body eight times in our English Old Testament. But this must not be taken to mean that body and soul are the same.

IMMATERIAL PART OF MAN

The immaterial part of man is the real person. The body is only the house in which we live. And death is moving out of the body. This certainly teaches that we continue to have conscious existence after we die.

Luke 16:19-31, *"There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence. Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."*

Scriptures teach conscious existence of the lost after death. The rich man was in conscious suffering after he died, and Lazarus

was in conscious comfort. The rich man's body was buried and the soul or spirit of Lazarus was taken into Abraham's bosom by angels. Their experiences after death were not bodily, therefore they were possessed of another element which had conscious existence after death.

What is said of the two men in this life is quite in keeping with actual experience, therefore what is said of them after death must also be true to facts. We grant that the physical torment described is symbolical, but it is symbolical of soul torment.

STEPHEN STONED TO DEATH

Stephen had preached unto these Jews the truth. Acts 7:54-60, "*When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth. But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God. Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul. And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.*"

Physical death is but a separation of the soul and body. This body is not my personality, my real self. My real self is something that cannot be seen but it is something that can have experiences outside the body. The body is dependent upon the spirit for conscious existence, but the spirit is not dependent upon the body.

PAUL'S EXPERIENCE

Paul had some wonderful experiences. He was given a thorn in the flesh to keep him humble. II Corinthians 12:1-10, "*It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven. And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell; God knoweth;) How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.*" This certainly teaches a disembodied spirit can consciously exist and be intelligently active. "*Of such an one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities. For though I would desire to glory, I shall not be a fool; for I will say the truth: but now I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth me to be, or that he heareth of me. And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.*"

And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong."

(Continued from Page 1)

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 longsuffering and doctrine,*" II Timothy 4:2. "*All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,*" II Timothy 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,*" Proverbs 27:5, 6. "*He that rebuketh a man, afterwards shall find more favour than he that flattereth with the tongue,*" Proverbs 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 Timothy 5:20.

3. Professing Christians streamline their faith by compromising the Christian life. The world has always hated the good man. "*Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good,*" II Timothy 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 not where 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.

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