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THESE HELPED SHAPE MY LIFE!

Before I arrived on the scene, God gave me two sisters and a brother.

I'm so grateful for their influence. Helen, Janie & Robert: they're all now in Heaven.

CONNECTED

April-June, 2024

BLESSED BEYOND MEASURE

We're three months into 2024; and this side of heaven, I can't imagine being anymore blessed than I am with the dear love of my life for over 61 years. Margaret and I have both lived longer than most of our friends, and we're still blessed with remarkably good health. We have many of the usual *old-people* maladies, but we can't count high enough to count all of our blessings.

We started the new year with our family in Steamboat Springs, Colorado. Yes. We had a white Christmas. What a joy to spend quality time with our dear family. We're planning to do it again in May. "*Granny*" is passing a significant milestone, and every one of us want to make sure that she knows she's loved and appreciated.

Our lives are very much intertwined with our church. The people there are like a second family. So much of what we do is about ourselves and mundane things, which we ultimately leave right here. Why would anyone not want to be a part of one of the Lord's churches where God's people are plugged into something eternal? Oh, what a privilege to be a part of something so much bigger than us!

The last three months have been consumed with *What*

We Believe and Why III. Yes, that's my newest book. I'm about 3/4 of the way; working on Chapter 36. There are so many scriptural issues burning in my heart, and I am addressing many of them in this book. Early in February, the two of us were in North Texas at the Lake Worth Preaching Workshop and with our friends at [Midway Baptist Church](#) in McKinney. In March, it was a blessing to preach at the [Gateway Baptist Church](#) in Gatesville. Pastor Mike Bragdon has not been well. Please pray for him.

My heart burns for this written ministry. Pray that I will be faithful and fruitful, and that I will be a wise steward of my remaining time. Time is ever my biggest challenge. Often, I have mentioned that *good is always the biggest enemy of the best*. So often, we are not aware that all of those good things we're doing are taking us away from *the best* which God wants from us. Oh, how I long for a better grasp of **Psalm 90:11**: "*So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.*" I suspect that many of the things with which we fill our time will not make it past the grave, let alone *the Judgment Seat of Christ*.

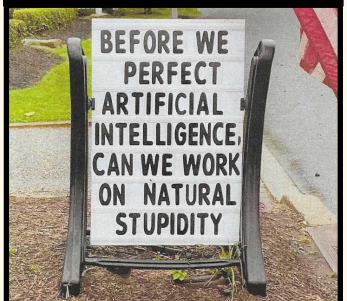
GRASSROOTS CHRISTIANITY

Not very long ago, a petite little lady who is watching her seventies ebb away was in the checkout line at her local grocery store. The young guy of a different color in front of her could easily have been her great-grandson. He was so embarrassed when he told the cashier to put the food back; he couldn't afford the \$27.00.

My friend handed her card to the cashier and quietly said, "*Put it on here.*" Total strangers, but constrained by a heart that has met the Messiah. A quiet act of love and compassion, unnoticed by all but a few; but not by the one who gave His life for her.

As she left the store, the sacker said, "*I saw what you did to help that young man, and I thank you.*" On the parking-lot, the young man lingered. With a humble heart, he came near my Christian sister and said, "*Can I give you a hug. You'll never know how much what you did helped me and touched my heart.*"

"*And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me,*" **Matthew 25:40**.



"He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life," 1 John 5:12

A WHOLE LOT OF TWISTING GOING ON

Satan is capable of telling what we sometimes call a *bald-faced lie*. He's good at it, and he does it quite often. He is "*A liar, and the father of it,*" **John 8:44**. It's obvious that he is also a master at twisting and perverting, even the best of things like "love."

Who could be against love? "*God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him,*" **1 John 4:16**. "*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life,*" **John 3:16**. "*And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity,*" **1 Corinthians 13:13**. True love, the agape love of God truly is "*a many splendored thing.*"

More and more, I'm seeing and hearing the implication that if you don't *approve* of everything, you're full of hate and don't love. Often Jesus Christ is invoked as being a person who loved everybody; and hallelujah, that is true. Jesus loved sinners enough to die in their place. "*Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us,*" **1 John 3:16**. This same Jesus who was full of love also stood unrelentingly against sin, and called on sinners to "*repent.*" Never once did Jesus Christ give any support to the false claim that "*if you don't approve of my lifestyle and the way I'm living, you don't love me.*" Can you imagine calling Jesus a hatemonger because He condemned sex outside of marriage, lust, greed and false piety?

Have you seen that new genre of television commercials showing two people silhouetted behind a thin, backlit curtain? They are kissing in a romantic embrace. As talk about loving everybody progresses, the couple walks around the curtain into the light: two gay men or women. The message thunders through; if you don't approve of this, you don't love. More and more, people who do not agree with the LGBTQ agenda are seen as hatemongers. When children encounter disapproval from their parents for clearly God-forbidden conduct, many of them slam their parents with "*You don't love me.*" The increasingly popular notion is that *loving me means approving of everything I do, say and believe.*

Love and approval are not at all one and the same. God loves all sinners, but He hates their sins. "*Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity,*" **Habakkuk 1:13**. "*God shall bring every work into judgment,*" **Ecclesiastes 12:14**. God's stance against evil is never in question. The destruction of the earth with water, the death of His son in the place of sinners and the existence of a lake of fire are testimonials to how much God who is love hates sin in all forms and fashions. What a twisted lie it is to say that because God doesn't approve of a person's sin, God doesn't love that person! How ridiculous to imagine that because God loves sinners, He also approves of their sinful living! God has lots of rules (*do* and *do not*), but His love is not in question.

However, that's the type of twisted reasoning which Satan is using so successfully today. Because Christians do not approve of homosexuality, transgenderism, abortion and sex outside of marriage, there are masses of people who call us *hatemongers* and say we don't love. God condemns lying, prejudice, drug abuse, alcoholism and all forms of immorality; yet those of us who say these things are wrong are accused of being hateful and judgmental. They often misquote Jesus who said, "*Judge not, that ye be not judged,*" **Matthew 7:1**. They don't bother about the context, and the point Jesus was making; instead, they lift His words out of context, and then make it appear that He taught something He didn't teach at all.

A person with even a kindergarten knowledge of the Bible understands that love and approval are not one and the same. It's a twisted, perverted lie for anyone to say, "*If you don't approve of all I say and do including things God declares to be evil, then you have no love and are full of hate.*" It is absolute perversion to accuse Christians of not being loving people.

Sadly, this kind of attack has shut the mouths of too many people who know better. Seems that nobody wants to be called a *hatemonger*, one who does not have the love of Christ. That's especially true when it's within a family. Everybody knows you'd better not say anything negative about the sins of family members. The "*You don't love me*" hammer is quickly brought right out of the devil's toolbox. Furthermore, if a family member or close friend is guilty of sin that is condemned by God, the issue is off the conversation list, even though the family member is not personally named.

If anything is clear in the Bible, it's the fact that God's people are to stand up for truth and righteousness. We're to do so in a godly and loving way, but we cannot remain silent when truth is at stake. Through the great prophet Isaiah God said, "*Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins,*" **Isaiah 58:1**. Jesus Christ didn't walk the hills of Israel for over three years in silence for fear He that might hurt somebody's feeling and be misunderstood as a hatemonger. He was kind, but He was honest and called it like it was.

I challenge all of us who name the blessed name of Jesus Christ to "*let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven,*" **Matthew 5:16**. Be kind and gracious. Let the spirit of Christ mark you. Always speak "*the truth in love,*" **Ephesians 4:15**, but never be afraid to stand up for what is right before God or against what's wrong before God. Don't let the master beguiler Satan deceive or silence you with either a *bald-faced lie* or a twisting of the truth. Don't allow yourself to buy into the illogical and untrue claim that "*If you don't approve of my sins, you don't love me.*"

A MATH PROBLEM

Question: Three frogs sat on a log and one decided to jump off. How many frogs were left?

Answer: Three.

Explanation: Although almost everyone answers "Two," the correct answer is "Three." Just because the frog *decided* to jump does not necessarily mean he actually *did* it. There is a gap between what you decide to do and what you actually do. Many decisions are no more than *Pipe Dreams*.

A BOOK I HAVE RECENTLY READ AND HIGHLY RECOMMEND

How the West Really Lost God

By Mary Eberstadt
Templeton Press
300 Conshohocken, PA 19428
ISBN: 978-1-59947-379-6

Wow! What a book! 246 pages of challenging, mind-stretching documented claims, plus an 11-page index/bibliography! This book is honest. When Mary Eberstadt is speculating, offering theoretical information, making an unproven claim, she says so. There are 9 full chapters, a strong introduction, a conclusion, an epilogue, acknowledgments and notes.

The stance of the book is that Christianity and the family are in a symbiotic relationship. In a society, one cannot survive or prosper without the other. They're like the double helix in the reproductive cell. They go hand-in-hand; one compliments the other.

Secular is on the opposite end of the spectrum from Christian. One is the antithesis of the other. To most casual observers, the European intellectual movement of the late 17th and 18th centuries known as *The Enlightenment* emphasized reason and individualism over belief in God and acceptance of the teachings of Christianity has substantially reshaped the landscapes of Europe and the Americas. Over the years since the *Enlightenment*, Christianity (and religion in general) has steadily declined. At the same time, *Secularism* has steadily grown. On front after front, Christianity has been replaced with Secularism.

There are those who disagree, and contend that Secularization does not exist. Chapter 1 of this book addresses that stance in detail, and then concludes that Secularization does exist in ways that have substantially reshaped the landscapes of Europe and the Americas.

Ms. Eberstadt quickly moves to the real causes of this move away from God and all things which have to do with Him and His teaching. One over-riding "intellectual" explanation for this radical move away from Christianity (and belief in God) is "the comfort theory." Supposedly belief in God comforts people and gives them a sense of security. Adherents claim God is like a giant pacifier to ignorant and unlearned people. The idea is that as men become more educated (enlightened), they will no longer need the pacifier. Out of this kind of thinking has come the idea that God is dead; that He never existed except in the mental concepts of men. As a whole, the atheist community views itself as vastly superior intellectually to those who believe in God, especially the Christian God and Christianity. Intellectuals see Christianity as "*an easy way out.*" Ms. Eberstadt spends time showing how unreasonable that thinking is.

The following three chapters are devoted to *Circumstantial Evidence for the "Family Factor."* She deals with the empirical links among marriage, child-bearing and religiosity. She follows with evidence from the demographic record, and shows how fundamental changes in family formation have accompanied the decline of Christianity in the West. Chapter 5 shows how the *Family Factor* explains problems that existing theories of Secularization do not explain.

One of the most eye-opening chapters of the book explains how some churches have contributed to their own downfall by ignoring the *Family Factor*. The public record shows that church groups which have gone soft on Bible doctrine, especially its teachings on the family are those in the greatest decline. Their numbers have plummeted, their money has dried up, they're not reproducing themselves and many of them are in a death spiral. Churches that have stood true to Bible doctrine, especially on the family are the ones which are most healthy and prosperous: biblical marriage, divorce, the sanctity of life, abortion, morality, homosexuality, etc.

Toward the end of her book, Ms. Eberstadt considers the future of faith and family from two viewpoints: pessimism and optimism. Her educated speculations are quite intriguing. She also addresses the question: *Why Does Any of This Matter?*

This book is really good and sobering reading. It's not for people with their heads in the clouds or those content to go with the flow with little interest in the currents of reality that are constantly moving them along. Every Christian ought to read this book, especially pastors/preachers/deacons and those who are serious about the work of God.

I highly recommend *How the West Really Lost God*. It's well-done and places lots of things in perspective. I wish I had read it much earlier in my life.



We Like Baseball

Two Happy Ole Grandpas and The Apple of Our Eyes. Nate Shugart and his grandpas: Ken Shugart and Lester Hutson. Astro game almost 20 years ago

***Dream big;
work hard!***

***Backbone beats
wishbone every time.***

"When our Founding Fathers passed the First Amendment, they sought to protect churches from government interference. They never intended to construct a wall of hostility between government and the concept of religious belief itself."
RONALD REAGAN

A PASSION FOR COLD-BLOOD MURDER

It's hard for me to comprehend the reality that I live in a society that openly and unashamedly advocates cold-blood murder. Yes, murder of the cruelest sort; the premeditated murder of innocent babies who have no ability to fight for themselves.

They call this heinous murder *"women's health care,"* and disguise what is really happening under several other words of semantical cover: *"abortion"* and *"a woman's right to her own body."* To cover this criminal, God-rejecting practice, an unborn baby is called a *"fetus."* Semantics! Yes, nothing but *smoke and mirrors* to cover cold-blood murder. People know better. How many pregnant mothers have you heard proudly announce, *"I'm going to have a fetus?"* From the start, people know it's a *baby*. It doesn't magically become a baby on week 40 or the 280th day. When a baby dies in the womb, nobody says, *"My fetus died."* Sir Walter Scott well said, *"Oh, what a tangled web we weave, when first we practice to deceive."*

People across the planet who support this cruel and extremely wicked practice argue that *"denying women, girls, and other pregnant people access to abortion is a form of discrimination and jeopardizes a range of human rights."* It's hard to believe that killing an innocent baby is a *"human right,"* but that's exactly what a very large percentage of the people on this planet believe. Somehow, they have blinded themselves to the bloody, vicious, cruel practice it is: little babies writhing in pain and agony as their brains are sucked out of their cracked skulls, body parts being ripped off and stem cells marketed. It's not a quick gunshot; it's a slow and agonizing death.

Human sacrifices including babies has for centuries been a practice of some raunchy pagans. Who would have ever thought it would become one of the most common practices of civilized people, especially *"Christians?"* Friends, as one who has given his life to the study of the Bible, I tell you there is nothing *"Christian"* about murder, especially of babies. There is no way to mask it, and make it right. A skunk by any other name is still a skunk. The God of truth sees right through veneer.

I stand amazed at the political landscape before us here in the U.S.A. At every political level, candidates are running for public on a *"I support the reproductive rights of women."* Many of them spell it right out: *"I support a woman's right to an abortion."* Oh, my soul! Making the cold-blood murder of innocent babies a chief plank in a political campaign. Night after night on public television openly bragging about the support of the cruelest form of murder! No. I never imagined that I would live long enough to witness such open commitment to murder. Rename it, cut it anyway you wish; but it's still taking the life of a little human being who doesn't have the power to fight back. I feel somewhat like Jeremiah the prophet as he lamented the fallen city of God, Jerusalem. He asked, *"Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?"* **Lamentations 1:12.** How can we be so blithe and unconcerned when thousands of little babies are being murdered every day?

That any Christian could support such a heartless criminal activity appalls me. I cannot imagine supporting a candidate who says right upfront that he backs cold-blood murder at any level be it political dissenters, homosexuals, midlife people, old people or little baby people. You can rest assured that God is watching.

HIDING BEHIND AN EXCUSE

How many times have you heard this macho strut? *"That's just who I am."* *"I'm a man, a woman, preacher, engineer, accountant, attorney; and that's just the way we are."* Talk about arrogant, lame and antichristian! Here's an offensive person with flaws he/she is too blind to see, too proud to admit it and too lazy to correct the bad behavior; yet everybody around should *just get used to it.*

In anybody, this notable characteristic of bullies and the self-centered is obnoxious; but especially in those who claim to be Christians. The fact is that nobody has *arrived.* We are all sons and daughters of Adam and Eve; and every one of us has plenty of baggage. Anyone who says otherwise is lying through his teeth. God says, *"Every man at his best state is altogether vanity,"* **Psalm 39:5.** Fundamental to basic Christianity is the universal weakness and guilt of all people, and their need for help and a Savior. To deny that is to shake a fist of defiance in the face of God.

To say something like, *"That's just who I am, and you need to get used to it"* says *"I'm okay like I am, and I don't need to be changed for the better."* Christianity says we all need improvement, and God can change any man or woman for the better. *"If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new,"* **2 Corinthians 5:17.** The principles of real Christianity are universal. They apply across the board equally to men, women, engineers, preachers, whites, blacks, Hispanics and all the rest. Everybody needs more love, humility, respect, compassion, integrity and the ability to listen. The grace of God can change anybody. To hide behind an excuse is a direct affront to God. It's pride and arrogance of the rankest sort.

*"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil: for thou art with me."* Psalm 23:4

"Your walk talks, and your talk talks, but your walk talks louder than your talk talks."

Dr. David Gibbs, Jr.



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Fred: I know a taxidermist who can stuff and mount a fish in one hour.

Ned: So what? I can stuff myself in half an hour and mount a horse in a minute!

---- Eric Wallace, Tenafly, N.J.