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Volume XVII
Issue 407

The Virtual Veil

by — Stephen Hill

A friend of mine recently announced that he was deleting his Facebook account. Among the reasons he cited was a desire to avoid continual arguments (often with complete strangers). I commend him for his wise and mature decision. If you participate in Facebook and similar forms of social media, you have most likely been engaged in several heated debates, and many may have turned rather ugly. The protection provided by the virtual world allows us to act very differently online than we ever would in person. The country music artist, Brad Paisley, sings



I am confident that when believers debate online, most do not *initially* intend to stir up a heated fight. On the contrary, the goal is to defend the truth and to help others who disagree come to a realization of it. Almost inevitably, however, the debates evolve into accusations, name-calling and other petty insults. Many are even accused of not being believers for stating their disagreement, and I know people who have left groups altogether because of how they were treated.

Quarreling is nearly as commonplace (if not more so at times) than the edifying growth we seek.

The protection provided by the virtual world allows us to act very differently online than we ever would in person.

a song titled *Online* that pokes fun at the ridiculous false identities that people often attempt to live out on the internet. The song is intended to be comical, but its accuracy

makes it more scary than humorous.

I joined Facebook almost entirely for the purpose of participating in faith-related groups. It is simply the easiest way in our modern age to communicate quickly with like-minded believers and to participate in discussions with people from around the world in an effort to grow mutually. Yet, if you have participated in these groups, you know that quarreling is nearly as commonplace (if not more so at times) than the edifying growth we seek. This is undoubtedly due to the effects of the virtual realm, which shields us from direct confrontation.

Debates evolve into accusations, name-calling and other petty insults.

If you are reading this article, there is a good chance that you have written things online that you later came to regret. I am certainly no exception.

In order to combat the virtual veil, we must keep Scripture close to heart and commit to acting no differently online than we would face-to-face.

Speaking to Timothy, Paul advised,

(see *VEIL*, page 3655)

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Paul Our Guide – Christ Our Goal

ISSN: 1936-9360

Volume XVII, No. 407 – July 30, 2013

This free weekly electronic publication (52 times a year) is dedicated to:

- the proclamation of the riches of God's abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7);
- the affirmation of God's purpose to save all mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (I Timothy 2:3, 4; 4:10; Titus 2:11);
- the "preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began" (Romans 16:25);
- true freedom and liberty apart from law (Galatians 5:1);
- the organic nature of the church, the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12);
- the distinct message and ministry of Paul, the apostle to the nations (Romans 11:13);
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15);
- the recovery of rich Biblical truth that has too long remained hidden under the veils of traditionalism, prejudice, misunderstanding, and fear (Mark 7:7, 13);
- the completeness of the believer in Christ (Colossians 2:10), with:
 - total freedom from sins (Colossians 1:14);
 - identity in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6);
 - adult sonship position (Galatians 4).

This publication is a joint effort of a few members of the body of Christ. It is a product of our individual lives and ministries together. We do not claim infallibility for its contents. Our readers are asked to be as the Bereans and search the Scriptures (Acts 17:10-11; I Thessalonians 5:21).

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VEIL (continued from front page)

Now stupid and crude questionings refuse, being aware that they are generating fightings. Now a slave of the Lord must not be fighting, but be gentle toward all, apt to teach, bearing with evil, with meekness training those who are antagonizing (II Timothy 2:23-24).

We should be patient and gentle, refusing to involve ourselves in an argument that will be fruitless.

Likewise, Paul told the Romans to pursue,

That which makes for peace and that which is for the edification of one another (Romans 14:19),

and,

To no one render evil for evil (Romans 12:17).

Several passages, in addition to those of Paul's letters, reinforce the great importance of avoiding quarrel and taming our tongues. Proverbs 29:22 states,

An angry man stirs up strife, and a furious man abounds in transgression.

Writing to the Jews, James reminded that,

The wisdom from above is first, indeed, pure, thereupon peaceable, lenient, compliant, bulging with mercy and good fruits, indiscriminating, unfeigned (James 3:17).

The love of debate is intoxicating and online discussion forums are like a drug of which they yearn to get their daily dose.

Make no mistake that our written words are every bit as powerful as our spoken words. Granted,

written words do not carry inflections of the voice and other elements that may intensify their spoken delivery, but the effects on the recipient are every bit

as significant. In fact, on several occasions I've found out after speaking with people that I interpreted their written words more harshly than they intended.

Ideally, we would be able to speak with one another in person at all times; but since this is unfortunately not possible, we are left with learning to deal appropriately with one another in less personal forms. How, then, can we accomplish this important goal?

For starters, we can commit to not repaying evil with evil. If someone online calls us a name, we should not repay him by also calling him a name. Rather, we should be patient and gentle, refusing to involve ourselves in an argument that will be fruitless. We would do well to follow Paul's advice to avoid stupid questions completely, knowing they only lead to harm. In reality, we have no need to defend ourselves against personal attacks. Our defense should always center around *God alone!*

This is why Paul told the Corinthians that it was "*the least trifle*" that he may be examined by men (I Corinthians 4:3).

Many people actually have come to love debate. They ignite a fight with an antagonistic comment and attempt to beat their opponent at all costs.

Second, we must understand that, contrary to popular belief, *defense of the truth does not require an aggressive approach*. It *does* require aggressiveness in terms of conviction, but *not* in terms of antagonism. Paul advises us to be bold, but meek; strong, but gentle. We must recognize that each and every person is not the way they are – misled or not – out of choice. They are in exactly the place God wants them to be at that particular time and according to *His purpose*. Others are not "stupid" because they don't understand certain truths. They are merely ignorant at the time *by God's design*.

After spending enough time in discussion forums, it is apparent that many people actually have come to love debate. They ignite a fight with an antagonistic comment and attempt to beat their opponent at all costs. This mindset is most often rooted in pride and

(see *VEIL*, page 3659)



Royalty Working the Night Shift and Standing in a Bread Line

by — Dan Sheridan

This twenty years have I been with thee; thy ewes and thy she goats have not cast their young, and the rams of thy flock have I not eaten. That which was torn of beasts I brought not unto thee; I bare the loss of it; of my hand didst thou require it, whether stolen by day, or stolen by night. Thus I was; in the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night; and my sleep departed from mine eyes. Thus have I been twenty years in thy house; I served thee fourteen years for thy two daughters, and six years for thy cattle: and thou hast changed my wages ten times. Except the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely thou hadst sent me away now empty. God hath seen mine affliction and the labor of my hands, and rebuked thee yesternight (Genesis 31:38-42).

THE PATRIARCH REALITY SHOW

If satellite TV existed in the days of the Patriarchs, they never would have been subjects of a reality show. They were way too boring for that.

This generation is infatuated with action movies. Constant action. Things must always be moving. Did you ever notice that producers never film the “boring parts”? Movies go from one action scene to another. They don’t show the hour the woman takes putting on her make-up. They never film the entire car ride from one place to another. The stars get in the car and the next thing you know they’re getting out of the car at their destination. Why? Because those are the boring parts.

THE SHERIDAN FAMILY GOES HOLLYWOOD

Hey, I have an idea for a scene in the next classic movie. Here it is: film a Sheridan family scene!

Scene Script: Dan sitting at his desk writing this article. His daughter is laying on the bed next to him with her blanket and princess book. Then pan to his wife getting ready for work in the bathroom. Then, pan back to Ava reading her book. Then back to Dan as he gazes at his computer screen frustratingly rubbing his forehead because he can’t type or spell!



Now, for the Rita Hayworth line of the century, Becky says to Dan – Wait for it – Suspense— Action—

Dan, I’m going to have Anna or Timmy run to the store to pick up some fruit and lunchmeat for you guys.

Wow! Amazing! Exciting! *The Terminator* couldn’t compare! WoooooHooooo! And the academy award goes to ...

“What do you think, Mr. Spielberg?”

He never called me back.

It looks like I won’t sell my script too soon.

No Academy award. Oh well, on to the next script.

ABRAHAM:

175 YEARS OF VERY LITTLE ACTION

God’s people live 99-percent of their lives in the boring parts. It’s rarely an action movie. Take, for instance, Abraham. The man lived 175 years and yet we only read about a few events in his life. Only fifteen short chapters cover his life in Genesis. That’s it!

Most of his life was just normal stuff. Abraham took



care of his family, farmed, raised his livestock, conducted business, made political agreements as part of his confederation, loved his wife, raised his kids, and took a bath once in a while.

If you and I saw Abraham we wouldn't have guessed that he was one of the future rulers of the world! We would never have guessed that God chose him to be the one through whom the world would be blessed. He was way too normal!

Oh, the land God called Abraham to live in suffered from famine not long after Abraham got there. Thanks, God, right?

Oh, and I almost forgot. To add to all of these joys, Abraham held his wife as she breathed her last breath.

ISAAC, WATER DISPUTES AND SEX

Abraham had a son. His name was Isaac. He, too, is a future ruler of the world. His life is covered in three chapters. Most of it is taken up with disputes over water rights and sex.

Mr. and Mrs. Isaac spent twenty sorrowful years trying to have a baby. They couldn't conceive. I know people who have had to go through the sorrow of not being able to conceive. Mr. and Mrs. Isaac know their pain. I'm sure they tried all the medicine of the day to help them conceive. They even tried different sex-

ual positions. Mrs. Isaac cried herself to sleep many nights while her husband stayed up in the living room downing a few glasses of Scotch to ease his pain.

Finally they had kids. Joy of joys. Was it all good from there? Let's see.

One married bad women. They gave mom and dad heartache. The other deceived his brother. Then the other plotted to kill him as payback.

Thanks for the kids, God, right? We prayed for twenty years and *THIS* is what You give us?

JACOB ON THE NIGHT SHIFT AND TROUBLE AT HOME

Then Isaac has Jacob. His life is covered from Genesis 26-50. Much of that time he spent working nights on his father-in-law's ranch. He did that for twenty years. I've never seen any film of those evenings. He had low pay and no benefits. It was no glamour detail for sure. Having frostbite isn't fun. Neither is lack of sleep. But that was his job.

Imagine that you got into a time machine and went back to watch Jacob work. Would you have guessed that the guy out there in the field with frostbite was a future ruler of the world? Me either. He smelled like cattle.

He had domestic problems to add to the joys of his ►



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crummy job and deceiving boss. His wives bickered. He had a rough time keeping his house in order. He had to deal with his kids as well. They were a bunch. He had twelve boys. Twelve! They had their good moments; but they were jealous of each other and fought a lot, too. They even sold one of their brothers into slavery!

Jacob's life was no picnic. He even had to bury the love of his life.

Thanks again, God, right?

BROTHERS IN A BREAD LINE

These twelve brothers were the future rulers of the world, too. Even though they were royalty they had to suffer through a famine! They had a hard time putting food on the table. It got so bad that they had to travel from Canaan to Egypt to stand in a bread line. Imagine that.

They understood what some of us go through who have to stand in long lines at the unemployment office. Since I lost my job, my wife comes home from work on Thursdays and waits in line for six hours to get food from a local charity. Jacob's sons know what we're going through. They get it.

Well, there they were. The future rulers of the world standing in a bread line with thousands of starving people! You would have never been able to tell them

apart from everyone else. They were a few people who were lost in the crowd. Yet, they were God's chosen.

SERVING TIME

Joseph spent time in jail. What did he do? He made himself useful there. He didn't like it at all. He wanted out, but he made the most of his time. Imagine that: a future ruler of the world in jail.

God, can I be part of your life-planning committee? I think I can make some improvements on your current program.

THAT'S LIFE

Life is normal. It isn't an action movie. The problem is that this generation has been poisoned by TV. We have a false sense of reality. We want the stuff. The retirement package. The expensive vacations. We want everything Madison Avenue is selling us on the idiot box.

The glory of life is the daily stuff. God ordained it to be so. Enjoy it. Do your best. Most of it won't make for good TV, but that's the good stuff. We will have our sorrows and joys. They are God-ordained.

I'm sure Jacob complained and cursed under the pressure of circumstances. He wasn't given to pious talk. He never used religious language. He wasn't a deceiver like the religious nuts of today.



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Jacob laughed and cried. He enjoyed a good meal, had some bad ones too. He conducted transactions. He worried about tomorrow. He played with his kids. At times he had to discipline them for misbehaving. He got a good buzz during his wedding, and on other occasions, too. He made love to his wives and fought with them. He even tried multiple sex positions.

Yes sir, holy people drink, have orgasms, and scream during sex. They aren't religious at all.

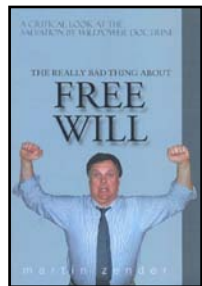
They have to bury people too. We may have to bury a spouse or a child, and parents, too. It sucks. We aren't supposed to like it.

SUMMING UP LIFE

No one is exempt from the ups and downs of life – *no one!* Not even YOU.

Yet, at the end of Jacob's life he looked back and summed everything up as follows:

God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life long unto this day, the Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; and let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers



The Really Bad Thing About Free Will

A Critical Look at the "Salvation by Willpower" Doctrine
by — Martin Zender
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The most destructive doctrine in the world is that of human free will. The doctrine of free will denies Christ's death for sins, it starts with the premise that your sins still stand against you. Your sins are still keeping God from you, and you from God. This is a direct denial of the work of Christ. In spite of what John 1:29 says, Christ's sacrifice on Calvary (according to modern-day "evangelists") did not remove your sins. This is the essence of the free will teaching: Your sins still count against you. It's the heart of the doctrine. This is why people are forced to make a free will decision to accept Christ. It is your free will decision, not the sacrifice of Christ, which finally removes sin and paves the way to God.

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Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth (Genesis 48:15-16).

Abraham's life is summed up in Genesis 25:8.

And Abraham expireth, and dieth in a good old age, aged and satisfied, and is gathered unto his people (YLT).

I like that: "God which fed me all my life long unto this day." Even during the lousy times. "Then he died **aged and satisfied.**"

Yes sir. That summed it all up. Life is a roller coaster. God is taking care of us even when it doesn't seem like it.

Next stop: Resurrection! Now *that* will be worth filming.

If we blink, life will pass us by. Live it. ■

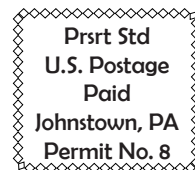
VEIL (continued from page 3655)

a desire to prove their knowledge, not a pure desire to uphold the truth. For such people, toning down the harsh rhetoric is all but easy. The love of debate is intoxicating, and online discussion forums are like a drug of which they yearn to get their daily dose. Do you think these people would act anywhere near the way they do online if they were to debate with others in person?

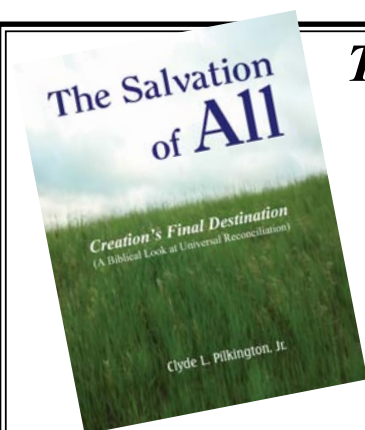
If you struggle with acting differently on the internet than you would in person, commit to altering your approach. Be gentle, patient and kind toward others, and ask yourself if what you are about to write is something you would say to the person while looking him or her in the eye. Refuse to respond to foolish questions and antagonizing comments, knowing your response will lead only to an argument from which neither party will benefit. Remember that those who disagree with us at times are not our enemies, but our brothers and sisters in Christ. If, after attempting to alter your habits, you are unsuccessful, consider deleting your online account. It is better to remove the temptation to argue than to fight a losing battle. For, a servant of the Lord must not be fighting, but be gentle toward all, bearing with evil those who are antagonizing (II Timothy 2:24-25). ■

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by — Clyde L. Pilkington, Jr.

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