

## *“Obiter Dictum”*

J. James Albert

(Our thanks go to Jim Albert for sharing another of his “CALIFORNIA LETTER” articles which invites much consideration. -Cecil Hook)

Dear brethren,

How do you like that title? Getting sophisticated are I not? Anyway it refers to the following quotes that impressed me in my reading as of late. Please think on them.

1.) “. . . But many who preach against denominationalism are the most denominational of all. When you name the church, which the Lord did not do, and put in place a set of human interpretations as binding, like a creed, whether written or unwritten, you have created a denomination. Even worse, you have set up 'the one true denomination', and begun to act as a judge of all men." - Olan Hicks, "News & Notes", March 2002.

2.) "The benchmark is Jesus Christ, not the Church of Christ. It is Jesus Christ, not the Lutheran Church. It is Jesus Christ, not the Roman Catholic Church. It is Jesus Christ. Not tradition. It is Jesus Christ, not the Bible as translated by a certain person or group or as interpreted by a given hermeneutic, trained exegete, or polemic champion. Jesus Christ!" - Rubel Shelly, "Wineskins", March/April, 2002.

3.) "We say we want a renewal of character in our day but we don't really know what we ask for. . . We want character but without unyielding conditions; we want strong morality but without the emotional burden of guilt or shame; we want virtue but without particular moral justifications that invariably offend; we want good without having to name evil; we want decency without the authority to insist upon it; we want moral community without any limitations to personal freedom. In short we want what we cannot possibly have on the terms that we want it." - James Davison Hunter, *The Death of Character*.

4.) "The search for truth is a job never completed, a journey that never ends, a painting never finished, or a symphony with the final crescendo never played. Any institution or organization that refuses to be self-critical, or refuses to consider or respond to legitimate criticism, from without or within, is doomed to stagnation and ultimate failure." - Robert H. Rowland, *Breaking the Mold*.

5.) "I cannot, therefore, make any one duty the standard of Christian state and character, not even immersion into the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and in my heart regard all that have been sprinkled in infancy without their knowledge or consent, as aliens from Christ and the well-grounded hope of heaven. 'Salvation was of the Jews' acknowledged the Messiah; and yet he said of the foreigner, an alien from the

commonwealth of Israel, a Syro-Phoenician, 'I have not found so great a faith, no, not in all Israel.'

“Should I find a Pedobaptist more intelligent in the Christian Scriptures, more spiritually minded and more devoted to the Lord than a Baptist, or one immersed on profession of faith, I could not hesitate a moment in giving the preference of my heart to him that loveth most. Did I act otherwise, I would be pure sectarian, a Pharisee among Christians. Still I will be asked, 'How will I know that one loves the Master but by obedience to his commandments?' I answer, 'In no other way.' But mark, I do not substitute obedience to one commandment, for universal or even general obedience. And should I see a sectarian Baptist or a Pedobaptist more spiritually minded, more generally conformed to the requisitions of the Messiah, than one who precisely acquiesces with me in the theory or practice of immersion as I teach, doubtless the former rather than the latter, would have my cordial approbation and love as a Christian. So I judge and so I feel. It is the image of Christ that the Christian looks for and loves; and this does not consist in being exact in a few items, but in general devotion to the whole truth so far as known." - Alexander Campbell, "Millennial Harbinger", 1837.

6.) ". . . The apostles and inspired writers of the New Testament did not speak of planning a 'worship service' or the need to build a 'temple' for Christians to assemble. 'Worship' or 'sacred service' is now what happens every time a Christ-like man or woman genuinely offers himself or herself in service to the Lord. The classic statement is proclaimed in Romans 12:1, 'Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - which is your spiritual worship.'

"We are challenged, therefore, by the privilege and the responsibility to lay our entire lives lovingly on the altar of service before our God. The Christian life of serving God everyday is a 'thank offering' or 'identification offering', wherein all of us as Christians identify with Jesus in laying our lives down for other people. . . ." - Perry C. Cotham, Ceasefire, under the heading "For Committed Christians, All of Life is Worship."

7.) "I never call Christians or others 'anti's', 'digressives', 'mossbacks', 'tackies', or 'trash'. I concede to all, and accord to all, the same sincerity and courtesy I claim for myself, as the Golden Rule demands. . . ." - T.B. Larimore, quoted by Holloway and Foster in *Renewing God's People*.

8.) "All interpretation is socially located, individually skewed, and ecclesiastically and theologically conditioned." - Clark H. Pinnok, *Tracing the Maze*.

9.) “But since men are so solicitous about the true church, I would only ask them here, if it be not more agreeable to the Church of Christ to make the conditions of her communion consist in such things, and such things only as the Holy Spirit has in the Holy Scriptures declared, in express words, to be necessary to salvation. . . than for men to impose their own inventions and interpretations upon others as if they were of Divine

authority. . . .such things as the Holy Scriptures do either not mention, or at least not expressly command?" - John Locke, "Letter Concerning Toleration".

10.) "That although inferences and deductions from Scripture premises, when fairly inferred, may be truly called the doctrine of God's holy word, yet are they not formally binding upon the consciences of Christians further than they perceive the connection, and evidently see that they are so . . . . Therefore, no such deductions can be made tests of communion." - Thomas Campbell, "Declaration and Address".

11.) "When we think of worshipping God, we tend to think in many cases that we are putting on a performance to please God. The atheist will suggest that a god needing praise and adoration is a deficient being and thus must be a creation of man. Many religious leaders conduct services as if God is going to evaluate the quality of singing, praying, preaching, etc. Over the years, there have been many debates about what should be done in worship and how it should be done, and the emphasis has often been on what will please God. Let me state categorically that God does not 'need' our worship, praise, encouragement, work, prayer, or money. If we understand God as the creator of the cosmos, and if in any way we comprehend that 'in Him we live and move and have our being', then surely we must understand that God is not dependent upon us. If all Christians on the planet were to stop worshipping God and stop giving their money, God 'would' not be affected in the slightest. God's work on this planet would still be done.

"The purpose of all these acts is not to benefit God, but to benefit man. The person who does not learn to give in a cheerful and willing way is a doomed person. Their inability will not allow them to know the real joy of love, family, marriage, sex, friendship, or being part of something greater than themselves. Learning to give cheerfully and joyfully is the only cure for selfishness and all the destructiveness it brings.

"Worship to God is the same kind of thing. . . . Worship is not a spectator sport, it is a beneficial tool God has given us for our benefit. One that can be done by everyone no matter what their age, physical or mental condition, body condition, or status in life. We please God in our worship by our attitude and willingness to allow His spirit to mold and shape us not by our theatrical accomplishments or sophisticated displays of our abilities." - John Clayton, "Does God Exist?", March/April, 2002

I hope these quotes stimulated your thinking. As I get older I realize more and more how much I don't know and how many questions I can't answer definitively. But thanks be to God my salvation is not quid pro quo relative to my intellectual ability.

In Him, J. James Albert, <albert.j@attbi.com>, July, 2002.

