

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Steadfast Faith

If everything goes as planned, 78-year-old Don Laughlin, the legendary founder of the gambling town bearing his name, will die an unusual death. The final beat of his heart and compression of his lungs will end like anyone else's, but the minutes to follow the flat-lined EKG will be a frenzied rush of technicians and experiments, as trained cryonics specialists pump cryopreservative fluid through his veins. By the end of that day, Laughlin's body will be strapped inside a stainless steel tube of liquid nitrogen, precisely monitored to preserve his body at exactly minus 360 degrees, where it will wait indefinitely until a day when science can "re-animate" his corpse. "It could be 20 years. It could be 200 years. It could be never," the casino tycoon says of his future resurrection, or reanimation. But should that day come, Laughlin won't be short on cash. Laughlin is one of about 800 living clients planning to preserve their heads or entire bodies at Scottsdale-based Alcor, the largest cryonics preservation facility in the world. They believe scientific advances will someday revive them and heal whatever ailment ended their lives. Like a growing number of cryonicists, Laughlin has also created a multimillion-dollar trust fund, which holds plenty of future spending money. Laughlin doesn't plan to keep his entire fortune, once reported to be nearly \$1 billion, for spending in his next life. Sitting near models of his planes and helicopters in the lavish office of his 20-story, 1,400-room Riverside Resort and Casino, the Minnesota boy is certain he could swing another rags-to-riches success in another life. So most of his fortune, including the casino, airplanes, helicopters and houses, will stay with his more religious, less cryonically-inclined family. But not all multimillionaires with cryonic plans have heirs. After legal death, Arizona residents David Pizer, 66 and wife Trudy plan to chill with their three dogs until science resurrects them in, Pizer guesses, about 150 years. In the meantime, Pizer's entire fortune, estimated at about \$10 million, will be compounding interest for his future spending pleasure. Pizer and Laughlin already have trust funds designated for reanimation and for the ongoing expenses of preserving their remains. Both specify that proceeds from their trusts will fund research they hope could someday resurrect them. Laughlin also plans to generously reward any scientific agency responsible for his future awakening, figuring that the risk of an overzealous scientist resurrecting a half-capable zombie is one worth taking. Standing near one of eight, nine-foot-tall stainless steel preservation tanks in the Alcor facility, David Pizer looks a bit like a pioneer himself. His love for old Western cowboys and Wild West memorabilia is evidence of his drive for adventure, exploration and risk. "If there really is an end to life, we need to fix it," Pizer says of his dream and hope for scientific immortality. The "patient bay" room where he stands is not much larger than the great rooms in many Valley homes, only this room houses stainless steel tanks of frozen corpses. "In a couple hundred years humans will not die," Pizer says, gazing at the tanks. Here, Pizer has about two dozen friends and acquaintances currently chilling within a few feet of him. They are legally dead and frozen, and Pizer believes he will someday eat with them again, perhaps in an eternal life. Most mainstream scientists disagree, but Pizer has what they lack: faith. Cryonics is his hope and passion.¹

What we have here is a tragic example of misplaced faith. These people *believe* that in time medical science will not only be able to find a cure for what caused their deaths, but will also be able to re-animate their corpses and bring them back to life. Of course, the Bible declares otherwise (Heb. 9:27). One might just as well hope that science discovers time travel! (And of course there are people who think we eventually will – along with finding space-travelers from other worlds, the existence of Big Foot and that both Elvis Presley and JFK are still alive! The blatantly naïve assumption that just because we *believe* something to be true because we would like it to be so, is contrary to what the Bible means by *faith*. Warfield astutely wrote, "It, of course, does not follow that all our 'beliefs,' 'faiths' correspond with reality. Our convictions are not infallible. When we say that 'belief,' 'faith' is the product of evidence and is in that sense a compelled consent, this is not the same as saying that consent is produced only by compelling evidence, that is, evidence which is objectively adequate. Objective adequacy and subjective effect are not exactly correlated. The amount, degree, and quality of evidence which will secure consent varies from mind to mind and in the same mind from state to state. Some minds, or all minds in some states, will respond to

very weak evidence with full consent; some minds or all minds in some states, will resist very strong evidence. There is no 'faith,' 'belief' possible without evidence or what the mind takes for evidence; 'faith,' 'belief' is a state of mind grounded in evidence and impossible without it. But the fullest 'faith,' 'belief' may ground itself in very weak evidence—if the mind mistakes it for strong evidence. 'Faith,' 'belief' does not follow the evidence itself, in other words, but the judgment of the intellect on the evidence. And the judgment of the intellect naturally will vary endlessly, as intellect differs from intellect or as the states of the same intellect differ from one another."² Over the last few decades, Christianity has suffered badly from the advent of the charismatic group known as the 'health and wealth,' or 'prosperity gospel' promoted by the likes of Kenneth Hagin, Kenneth and Gloria Copeland, Oral Roberts and more recently Joel Osteen. They have turned faith itself into something that has absolute sovereignty. Faith *in* Faith is the central thing in this teaching. Faith, as they define it, has magical powers and as such can be used to get God Himself to respond like the genie in Aladdin's lamp. Rightly did Machen once remark, "Faith is not a force that does something, but it is a channel by which something is received."³

One of the biggest concerns that the Apostle Paul displayed in his epistles was that of keeping his young churches firmly committed to his gospel (cf. his amazement at the Galatians in Gal. 1:6). As Moulton pointed out, "They were so young and inexperienced, and were so easily led astray by people who came to them preaching perversions of Christian truth with every possible type of persuasiveness. We cannot altogether blame the new Christians for listening to them. Their teaching sounded good, and there was no long tradition to hold the converts steadily to it. Paul has therefore to keep on exhorting them to be constant to what he had taught them. One verse in which he tries to drive home his message with a remarkable variety of expression is Col. 1:23."⁴

"The call here," observes Martin, "is to steadfastness in the face of a seduction which would draw the Colossians away from the Pauline gospel. 'Stable and steadfast' suggest metaphors of strength and security drawn from the picture of a house. It is settled on firm foundations (the Greek word for 'stable' indicates this clearly)."⁵ Let's look at this in some detail.

I. **Continue.** The word (*epimenete*) is the ordinary word for making a stay of some length in a place, as contrasted with a quick passing through. It stresses endurance or longevity. A similar expression is found in Col. 4:2, where we read "continue steadfastly in prayer." Perseverance cultivates patience and patience in turn displays itself on the way we respond to not only various situations, but toward others (Col. 3:12). In Acts 10:48, Cornelius asks Peter to remain with him for some time in order to consolidate the wonderful Pentecost that had come to him and his household. The word is often used also of Paul's stays in different places on his journeys (21:4, 10; 28:12, 14; I Cor. 16:7, 8; Gal. 1:18). Paul also uses it when he speaks of continuing alive (Phil. 1:24), and of continuing in God's goodness (Romans 11:22). I Tim. 4:16 is an appeal to Timothy to continue without fail in the commissions that have been entrusted to him. And of course it is equally possible to continue in sin (Romans 11:22). I Tim. 4:16 is an appeal to Timothy to continue without fail in the commissions that have been entrusted to him. And of course, it is equally possible to continue in sin (Romans 6:1), and in unbelief (11:23). 'Persist' would often be a good translation: the Pharisees *persist* in questioning Jesus (John 8:7), Peter *persists* in knocking until he is admitted (Acts 12:16). All of this is background to the verse in Colossians. The readers are to continue in their faith as a man makes a long stay in a place, and does not just halt for an hour or two. They are to continue as a man continues in life itself, letting their faith be as much a part of them as their very life. They are to persist and persevere in it, as Peter *persisted* until he attained the entrance he desperately needed.

II. **Grounded.** The word (*tethemeliomenoi*) is the normal Greek word for the foundations of a building, firmly built into the ground. Our Lord used it of the man who bases his action on the firm rock of His teaching (Matt. 7:25; Luke 6:48). Hebrews 1:10 quotes Psalm 102:25 where the Psalmist speaks of God's having laid the foundation of the earth, firm and sure. Eph. 3:17 has the beautiful phrase 'founded on love,' the firmest of all foundations. I Peter 5:10 (A.V.) has the promise that God will 'settle' those new Christian readers. It is the same word: He will give them fixed foundations for their faith. The noun 'foundation' is even more frequent than the verb. Luke 6:49 speaks of the man who does not do what Jesus says as being like a house built on earth without a foundation. Paul talks of his work in Corinth as that of laying a foundation (I Cor. 3:10), the only possible foundation, Jesus Christ (3:11). It is left to each man to build wisely or unwisely on the foundation that has been laid for him, and God Himself will test which it is (3:12f.). In Eph. 2:20 the foundation is the apostles and prophets (the order of words implies Christian prophets rather than Old Testament ones), but this is simply a change of metaphor. Christ Jesus is here the chief corner stone, and the apostles and prophets are thought of as the beginning of the Church on its human side. II Tim. 2:19 speaks of the 'firm foundation of God' in contrast with the profane babblings of false teachers. It is a double foundation, based firstly on the fact that God knows His own, and secondly on the need for righteousness in ourselves. (A

great text to preach from!) And of course this foundation is concerned not only with the present but with the future. We need to lay a good foundation for the life eternal which is life indeed (I Tim. 6:19). The foundations of the heavenly city are themselves firm and permanent, as Abraham knew (Hebrew 11:10), and precious in every way, as Revelation shows in its beautiful symbolism (21:14, 19). In Eph. 3:17, along with the word 'founded' goes the word *Rooted*, which is also used in Col. 2:7: '*Rooted and builded up in Him.*' But to what does this steadfast Faith refer? The theological Latin terms are helpful here. Does this refer to **fides qua creditor**: *the faith by which (it) is believed*; i.e., the faith of the believer that receives and holds the revelation of God, *fides* subjectively considered? Or does it refer to **fides quae creditor**: *the faith which is believed*; i.e., the content of faith as revealed by God, *fides* objectively considered? The context makes clear that it is the latter, *The Faith which is believed*. Thus, it points to the Gospel. In essence, this constitutes what Warfield refers to as *doctrina fidei* and becomes a synonym for 'the Christian Religion.'⁶ As the Old English divine John Davenant declared, "Upon what foundation this faith rests; even upon the free promises of God which are offered in the Gospel. This the Apostle shews in saying, *and be ye not moved from the hope of the Gospel: for the hope of the Gospel denotes the expectation of those rewards which the Gospel promises to believers.* For there is this difference between the Law and the Gospel: the Law puts the hope of eternal life under the condition of works and of perfect obedience; *He that doeth these things shall live in them*, Levit. xviii. 5: but the Gospel inspires the hope of salvation in us, through the mercy of God alone, on the condition of faith; *He that believeth hath eternal life.*"⁷

III. Steadfast and Firm. The expression 'steadfast' (*hedraioi*) and 'Not shifting from' (*mē metakinoumenoi*) refer to being firmly seated in a fixed position, not wandering about from place to place. It is used of a firm, unshakable resolve in I Cor. 7:37. The picture is of the Church as something that gives support and steadiness to *the truth*, so that it may not be rocked about by those who try to upset it. Thus Paul is calling upon the Colossians not to shift from the fixed ground of the Christian hope – i.e., the content and substance of the Gospel. This was Paul's major concern: that the Colossians like the Galatians would be *bewitched* by false teachers (Gal. 3:1) and embrace *another* Gospel and thus fall from grace (Gal. 5:4) by accepting a Gospel that mixes Law and Gospel.⁸

CONCLUSION: Look at the immediate context of Col. 1:23 and Paul's emphasis on the hope of the Gospel as it is centered on the Person and Work of Christ. The Gospel bearing fruit all over the world (1:6). God has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light (1:12). God has rescued us from darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves (1:13). Christ is the image of the invisible God (1:15). Christ is the firstborn over all creation. (1:15). By him, for him, through him all things were created (1:16). He is prior to and the preservation of all things (1:17). He is the beginning and firstborn from among the dead to have supremacy over all things (1:18). He is the head of the church (1:18). God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him (1:19). God reconciled all things to himself, making peace by the blood of Christ (1:20). We have been reconciled through death in order to be free from accusation (1:22). "These things," wrote Machen, "have been despised as idle speculation, but in reality they are the very breath of our Christian lives. They are, indeed, the battle ground of theologians; the church hurled anathemas at those who held that Christ, though great, was less than God. But those anathemas were beneficent and right. That difference of opinion was no trifle; there is no such thing as "almost god." The next thing less than the infinite is infinitely less. If Christ be the greatest of infinite creatures, then still our hearts are restless, still we are mere seekers. But now is Christ, our Savior (the One who says, 'Thy sins are forgiven thee'), revealed as God. There is now for us no awful Beyond of mystery and fear. We cannot, indeed, explain the world; to us it is all unknown, but it contains no mysteries for our Savior; He is on the throne; He is at the center; He is ground and explanation of all things; He pervades the remotest bounds; by Him all things consist. The world if full of dread, mysterious powers; they touch us already in a thousand woes. But from all of them we are safe. 'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.'" (Romans 8:35-39)."⁹

ENDNOTES

¹ John Dickerson, "Frozen Assets" available at <http://www.timespublications.com/mat06-feature1.asp>.

² B. B. Warfield, *Biblical and Theological Studies* (rpt. P & R, 19680 P. 380.

³ J. Gresham Machen, *What is Faith?* (rpt. Eerdmans 1962) p. 250.

⁴ H. K. Moulton, The Challenge of The Concordance: Some New Testament Words Studied In Depth" (Bagster, 1977) p. 187. I have used Moulton's analysis with modification.

⁵ Ralph Martin, Colossians: The Church's Lord and The Christian's Liberty (Zondervan, 1972) p. 59.

⁶ Warfield, op. cit. p. 444.

⁷ John Davenant, An Exposition of the Epistle to the Colossians I (rpt. James Family, 1970) p. 262.

⁸ I cannot underscore the importance of not mixing Law with Gospel, something that the Colossians were in danger of doing (cf. Col. 2:16-20). Listen to the wisdom of Calvin on this. "The law...as it simply prescribes the rule of a good life, does not renew men's hearts to the obedience of righteousness, and denounces everlasting death upon transgressors, can do nothing but *condemn*. ...The office of the law is to show us the disease, in such away as to show us, at the same time, no hope of cure. ...The law leaves man to himself, it condemns him, of necessity, to death. The gospel, on the other hand, by which men are regenerated, and are reconciled to God, through the free remission of their sins, is the ministry of righteousness, and consequently, of life also. ...[The gospel is] reckoned the doctrine of life, because it is the instrument of regeneration, and offers to us a free reconciliation with God. ...The office of the gospel is to bring a remedy to those who were past hope. ...The gospel brings [a man killed by the law] to Christ [and] opens the gate of life" (all emphasis in original). Calvin's New Testament Commentaries 10 (Eerdmans, 1973) pp. 43-45.

⁹ Machen, op. cit. p. 116.