"Bad beliefs make bad behavior."
—Warren Akin Candler

28-Feb-03

Balls and Strikes

When I awoke this morning, I actually remembered my dream. Since that does not happen very often, it seems particularly significant.

I dreamed I was a major-league relief pitcher, called upon in the bottom of the ninth to hold a one-run lead for my team. Strangely, I have no idea what team I was pitching for, but the other team was definitely the New York Yankees. I trotted out to the mound and took my warm-up pitches. As I prepared to face the first hitter, looking in to get the sign from my catcher, my battery mate simply disappeared and so did home plate.

As can only happen in a dream, this did not seem to faze me very much. I wound up and delivered a knee-high fastball directly over where the plate had been. "Ball!" yelled the umpire.

"Whaddya mean?" I shouted. "That was a perfect pitch!" The umpire ignored me, crouching down behind the invisible plate and catcher to judge my next offering. The batter dug in and waited.

Another ball appeared in my glove. Without a plate or a catcher's mitt to throw at, I decided fastballs were my safest bet—a little higher and on the
outside corner. The pitch went just where I wanted it to go, and the batter laid off. "Ball two!"

"You've got to be kidding!" I said, standing in front of the mound with my hands outstretched. "I can't throw a better pitch!"

"Play ball!" shouted the ump. Discussion over.

The thought went through my mind that, if I threw another fastball over the non-existent plate, the batter would jump all over it. I needed to throw an off-speed pitch to cross him up. I can throw a pretty good knuckleball, so that was my next pitch, low and inside. "0 and 3!"

I exploded: "How am I supposed to pitch without a plate and a catcher? How am I supposed to know where to throw the ball if I have no target? How am I supposed to know where your strike zone is if there's no plate?" The umpire just shrugged and crouched.

This time I just threw the ball in without even trying to put it any particular place. "Take your base!" said the umpire, pointing down the first-base line. The batter trotted that way.

"Every one of those pitches was a strike!" I told him. "And you know it."

"Yeah?" asked the umpire. "I can call your pitches anything I want." And I woke up—very frustrated.

Mulling this over as I lay there, it occurred to me that a similar frustration must be nagging a great many people in this world. In America, the "plate" has disappeared and so has the "catcher." Our "pitches" are being flung without a standard to judge them by. The "umpire," without a guide to base his judgments upon, capriciously calls them however he likes, and there is no standard by which we can effectively disagree. It is just his word against ours.

This nation used to have a fixed moral standard, the one found in the Bible. Beyond that, we had the Constitution and Bill of Rights and English common law, both based on biblical principles, to fall back on. Somewhere
along the line, these have fallen into disuse, forgotten in the rise of liberal ideas such as humanism, relativism, diversity, socialism, multiculturalism, feminism, and a host of other isms that aim to replace our Christian heritage with modern philosophies.

Now we are all on our own. Each person decides for himself what is right and wrong, no matter what his viewpoint or experience. Society, for the most part, is willing to let this occur, as long as nobody gets hurt, and then when someone does get hurt, the judicial system rarely solves the problem. It just locks the offender up for a time, and all is thought to be well.

This has been tried before and failed. The book of Judges twice indicts Israel for just this problem: "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 17:6; 21:25). What the book shows is the depths to which that culture sank when no common standard—no home plate, if you will—guided its beliefs and decisions. It is long past time when the decent people of this nation should have demanded a return to Christian standards. If we do not act now, we may never have another chance to act this side of something far worse.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

Don't Be Indifferent (1995)
by John W. Ritenbaugh

We need to be sober and alert, realizing that we don't have an infinitude of time to prepare for Christ's second coming. We cannot allow ourselves to become surfeited with the world's distractions, being lulled off to sleep as the foolish virgins, wasting our precious time. We need to exercise steadfast faithfulness, exercising vigilance as we approach the Day of the Lord in order that we don't let it take us by surprise. Living righteously on a continuous basis will put us in the right attitude, keeping us prepared for this event, causing us to properly have love for His appearing. Sorrow, fear, anguish, and dread characterize those who are unprepared.
From the Archives: Featured Article

Dead to the Law?
by Earl L. Henn (1934-1997)

Romans 7, verse 4, says that we are 'dead to the law through the body of Christ.' What does this mean? Earl Henn explains the meaning in its context, showing that it refers to the 'old man' which perished at our baptism.

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