

March 1, 2011

“THE PINBALL & THE BULLET”

Dear Friends & Family,

(2/15) In working from my home, which translates into being my office, each day I encounter a million distractions to the work of the Lord: my brain, this computer, my refrigerator, grandchildren (Kim baby-sits some of them here two times a week or more), help with household chores (our youngest son Caleb, who is our in-house “neat-freak” & housecleaner in a good way, has since gotten married; as a way to express my love to Kim, I’ve tried to fill his shoes, but am a poor substitute for Caleb, to be sure!), etc. I strive to be about the Lord’s business & Word as much as I can. I often study on my knees by our bed. I do so for two reasons because of my sciatica, I cannot sit

in a chair for any extended period of time. Also, as I pour over the Word of God, it’s inevitable as I have had collisions with it, that I want to go to my knees anyway, not to mention my face. Martin Luther said the book of Romans should be read on one’s knees. Of course, this goes for the entire Word of God. Abraham Heschel, who wrote the classic work, “The Prophets”, said that to read them was to have a collision with the truth of God & to remain indifferent to such blows was to have a skull of **stone**. Recently, this phenomenon of the Word’s power to penetrate, divide my soul & spirit, & judge the thoughts & attitudes of my heart, has been likened in my thinking to a bullet & a pinball. Several years ago, PBS aired a documentary re: the assassination of JFK. It had to do with the various & numerous “conspiracy theories” surrounding the beloved “Camelot’s” tragic death. One way forensic investigators attempted to do this was to track the path of the bullets of the high-powered rifle Lee Harvey Oswald used from the Texas Book Depository that fateful November day in 1963. They were hoping either to prove or dispel the “grassy knoll” theory, that, given the trajectory of the bullets that killed the president, there had to be another gunman besides Oswald in the assassination. To replicate as closely as possible the president’s body tissue, if I recollect correctly, they had a jelly-like substance which they fired the same type of bullet through via the same type of rifle. What they discovered was that, unlike they expected, the bullet did not pass directly thru JFK’s body, but zigzagged throughout. I do not mean to be insensitive to this tragic event, but I could not help but recollect that TV show when I recently noticed how the Word of God would enter me via my eyes &/or ears & do its penetrating, & to be honest, “deadly” work. Deadly? Yes, deadly. It has a way of killing sin & flesh in you, & rightly so. Because God’s Word is so deep, & all encompassing, it has the ability to not only address the “surface issues” in your life, but, like a bullet, it “zigzags” back & forth in your heart & mind & hits other (t)issues, attitudes, & sinful thinking & behavior patterns as well. Thank our God, that although His Word does its “dirty work”, i.e., it deals w/our “dirt”, it also heals & strengthens at the same time.

“THE PINBALL WIZARD?”

Forgive the expression, but any baby-boomer will remember that song by *The Who* from the 70’s. Again, not to be irreverent, but my mind pondered as well the paths & principles of an old-fashioned pinball machine as I reflected on the dynamics of the Word of God as it enters the human soul. Once the ball enters the playing field, it begins to drop & hit obstacles strategically placed inside the unit. If you’ve ever had the opportunity to do so, you’ll remember how very heavy a pinball is given the relative smallness of its size. So is with God’s Word. Likened unto “seeds” in the parable of The Sower (& elsewhere), yet incredibly “heavy” w/ what it carries within itself. By the way, our theme this year for the Hopewell Network Camps that I direct is “Chabod”, which is the Hebrew word for “glory”. However,

it is also translated in the Scriptures as “heavy” or “weight”. That is exactly what the staff & kids experience camp as they sit under it as it is carried into their minds & hearts by the Holy Spirit’s illuminating power. As this heavy ball hits the machine’s towers & bumpers, they often light up & register points. “The entrance of Your Word brings light”, the Psalmist said (Ps.119:130). Few things are more gratifying & pleasant to the saint’s soul than to receive the Holy Spirit’s illumination & understanding to a certain portion &/or text in the Bible. However, when the ball “bumps” the obstacles within, if they were human, it would “hurt”. And, as cited above, this the Word often does to us as it deals with our sin, our pride, our complacency, etc. But, however much we want to deny it, pain is often a good thing. It’s kind of funny how the pinball player will try to paddle the ball away, only to send it up again through the playing field to light up more areas, hit more obstacles, & gain more points! This is one way to look at how the Lord designed the purpose of His Word in the hearts of His people. It enters us, either through hearing or reading it, bounces around for a while, does its painful/illuminating/“points’ gaining” work, then, after its particular work & season is done in our hearts/minds, “drops out the bottom”, so to speak. This is only to be followed by another four pinballs or so! Actually this process will continue up until the point of our physical death in our Lord’s sanctification process in us, making us into the image of Jesus. There is no escaping it, Beloved. In fact, Romans 8:29 says we were predestined to be conformed into Jesus’ glorious image. I said above that when the ball hits an obstacle in the machine, a light goes on. When you see yourself in God’s light, oh, it can be so very painful, & frankly, it needs to be. I had so many bullets & pinballs of God’s Word racing through my body recently, that I began to wonder if I would ever change in so many areas of my life. My pride, my vanity, my-way-too-often judgmental/critical spirit, my prune-shaped heart re: love toward God’s people, etc... I wish I could say, Beloved, that the list doesn’t go on & on. It does. It does.

"YOU ARE THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD...& THE CHURCH!"

And, as if this weren’t bad enough—as I seek the Lord regularly in my home, just when I think I’m getting some-where spiritually, & have “got it down”, etc., I go to church, surrounded by so many people who love me. What happens? The light in them exposes more error in me! When I thought I had it together, I see how very little I do when I’m around my church family. Being with them, I see my spiritual pride even more glaringly, even more clearly. I’m humbled. And, I need to be! My church family is like those pinball machine “spindles” to me that light up when I hit them! Their light exposes me! But that’s what I need & that’s how Jesus designed His Body! I believe this is why so very many who once walked so closely w/Jesus but for various reasons have shrunken back don’t come back to church. Just as with sinners, whose real reason Jesus said (despite what they may say!) as to why they don’t come to Him is for fear of their sins being exposed (Jn.3:19), so it is with too many saints: they’re too ashamed & don’t want to be exposed by the light of God’s people. If they (we) could but remember, Jesus exposes our darkness to deliver us from it & to heal us. This is what God’s Word is intended to do—to drive you to a sense of helplessness in yourself & to drive you *to Him*. Recently, while lying in bed one night & seeing myself for what I am due to my immersion into God’s Word & my being exposed by my church family’s light (though they had no idea!), I once again began to despair if I was ever going to change in these many areas. I entreated the Lord in my heart to give me some word from His Word that would give me hope & encouragement in these very dismaying matters that we face from time to time. He did! This is the text that came to my mind immediately upon doing so: **“He is able to save to the uttermost those who come to God by Him.”** (Heb.7:25). Jesus’ gracious word to my heart brought instant hope, faith, & encouragement to me & such ardent love, worship, & gratitude to Him! That is exactly what grace is designed to do! Yes, dear Lord, I so very much need Your saving power *to*

the uttermost! In that case, O Jesus, bring on the bullets & pinballs of Your Word. We shall endure, & be changed.

Kim & I are so very grateful for those of you who take some of your precious time to read this; it means more than you know. Also, for those of you whom the Lord leads to pray for us &/or help us do His work, we thank you as well.

Michael & Kim