



SHOOTING FIRST, THEN DRAWING THE BULL'S-EYE

The story is told of a stranger driving through a small southern town and observing that many of the large trees along the streets, as well as the sides of old abandoned buildings, had a "bull's-eye" on them with a shooter's mark in the dead center of every one of them. Thinking there must be a "dead eye" shooter in the town the stranger stopped and asked a local citizen about the matter. The local explained that what the stranger was seeing were the exploits of the village idiot who shot first, then drew the "bull's-eye" around his mark!

The story reminds me of how some folks approach the study of the Bible: they decide first what they want to believe about a matter; then they find the text that "supports" what they have already made up their mind to believe about that matter. My "News & Views" of last week ("We Have Re-studied The Issue") is a classic example of what I am talking about. A few churches of Christ have decided to begin using instrumental music in some or all of their services. Under the guise of a "re-study," they adopt a course of action they had already decided on: "We intend to have instrumental music in our services"!

Other examples of "shooting first and then drawing the bull's-eye" can be noted. A number of years ago a young liberal, progressive preacher was desperately looking for a way to convince himself that all believers in Christ, whether or not they had actually obeyed the gospel (II Thessalonians 1:6-9; Romans 6:16-18) and regardless of their doctrinal beliefs or religious practices, were acceptable to God and members of the body of Christ. His view had come to be that denominationalism is not wrong and that people in all denominations are pleasing to God. On a given morning, he set out on a search to "prove" what apparently he had already made up his mind to believe! He told his wife that he had to go to a quiet place where he could be alone and undisturbed until some answer came. "How do you expect to get an answer?" she asked. "I don't have the slightest idea," he said. "Any way God sees fit to reveal it – through the Bible, by sending someone to talk to me, by a word from heaven, or by an inner understanding."

He went to a wooded area some twenty miles from his home, "determined not to eat or return home until God provided answers..." He spent the next hour or two in prayer – praying while walking, while

kneeling, and while lying on the ground. He pleaded and sobbed and quoted Scripture to God, looking for an answer.

Finally, he returned to a picnic table in the wooded area, stood his Bible on its spine, and turned it loose to fall open where it would. It fell open to Psalm 115. He began reading and came to verse 3: "But God is in heaven; He does whatever He pleases." Voila! He had his answer! The text "proved" that God approves of denominationalism and accepts all sincere believers, regardless of their beliefs or practices! (The preceding incident is taken from *The Sound of His Voice*, pp. 75-80, copyright by Edward Fudge, and is used by permission).

I wonder what would have happened if the young preacher had started reading in Psalm 112:1, or if his Bible had fallen open to Deuteronomy 4:2, Proverbs 30:6, Proverbs 14:12; Matthew 7:21-23, Matthew 15:8-9, Acts 17:11, Romans 10:1-2, I Corinthians 4:6, Galatians 1:6-9, I Thessalonians 5:21, I John 4:1, II John 9, or any number of other passages. (These passages need to be reflectively read by all). What an utterly bizarre way of interpreting the Scriptures and determining God's will! What a classic example of "shooting first, and then drawing the bull's-eye"! And the rest of us are supposed to listen to preachers/teachers/elders (the man professes to be all three, plus being a lawyer) of this sort and hold them up as Bible scholars???!!! I marvel! I truly marvel!

Yet I wonder how often this approach is followed by those who have already made up their minds as to what they believe about the eternal punishment of the wicked in hell, grace, whether or not baptism (immersion) is essential to salvation from alien sins, the relationship of the Old and New Testaments, the role of women in the work and worship of the church, divorce and remarriage, and a host of other matters.

"Now these were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11, KJV). Clearly, when it comes to the teaching of God's word, it is wise not to "shoot first, and then draw the 'bull's-eye' "!

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