

“SECOND GLANCE”

Marvin L. Weir

The above title is from an article by Rick Atchley that is proudly posted on Abilene Christian University's website (www.acu.edu/acutoday/summer_2006.html). ACU honored Rick with a “Distinguished Alumni Citation” in 2006, and the article contains his comments upon receiving the award. Rick credits ACU with influencing him until his graduation in 1978, and then continuing to influence him through Bible Lectureships, relationships with professors, “and insight from the books they have authored.” He states that there are “five themes in [his] ministry -- big thoughts -- and the seeds for them were planted through my relationship to the university.” I want to put at least three of Rick's “big thoughts” that he and ACU are so very proud of, under the microscope of God's Word.

1) *“First, the gospel of Christ is bigger than all other doctrines. I didn't know that when I first enrolled at ACU. I used to think that all biblical interpretations were equal in importance and in relation to salvation. My view was quickly challenged by the diversity of views I encountered in my fellow students.”*

It is obvious that Rick was better off before enrolling in ACU than after enrolling! Does the Bible say “the gospel of Christ is bigger than all other doctrines?” No, but Atchley does! Both *gospel* and *doctrine* refer to the same thing -- God's truth that saves! What is truth? God's Word is truth (John 17:17). The Gospel is God's revelation to man. It is “a reference to the way, the plan, the system, the scheme God has designed, devised and delivered to make man righteous” (*System of Salvation*, James Boyd, p.8). Is one part of the Gospel that God has devised to make man righteous bigger than another part? I think not!

John says, *“Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds”* (II John 9-11). The “doctrine” (KJV) or “teaching” (ASV) is the teaching Christ did personally through Himself and His apostles. Regardless of what Atchley would have one to believe, there is no “big” or “little” teaching or doctrine of Christ! One who will not abide in all the teaching or doctrine of Christ is not to be fellowshiped.

Atchley quips that when Jesus was asked about the most important law, He did not reply, “Well, they're all equal.” Instead, Atchley rightly notes that Jesus answers the scribe, saying, *“The first is, Hear, O Israel; the Lord our God, the Lord is one: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. The second is this; Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these”* (Mark 12:29-31). Is it not obvious that Jesus is teaching that this is the foundation for all other matters? Proper

love for God will motivate one to do all that God would have him to do. As Jesus said, *“If ye love me, keep my commandments”* [not just the big one] (John 14:15).

Atchley has decided *“that the emphasis a subject deserves in [his] sermons is based on its proximity to the cross. The closer it is to the cross, the more I must talk about it. The gospel of Christ is bigger than all other doctrines.”*

It is obvious that for Atchley and his followers the Gospel is believing in Jesus Christ and His death, burial, and resurrection. Atchley has decided he and his brothers *“are not going to agree on everything. We are going to be wrong on some things, but he’s my brother if he’s right on Jesus.”* Atchley is famous for quoting himself and absolutely no Scripture! One cannot be “right on Jesus” and not abide in “the doctrine [teaching, ASV] of Christ” (II John 9)!

2) *“Second, the grace of God is bigger than any sin or mistake.”* Atchley credits Lynn Anderson for helping him understand that his *“salvation didn’t depend on [his] moral or doctrinal perfection, but on [his] faith in the perfect Son of God.”* Atchley then says, *“Before I knew that, I would have had no good news for the woman who was married five times.”*

The liberals teach that God’s grace covers sins of which sinners refuse to repent. Christ did not say to the woman to whom Atchley refers, “I have good news for you. You may because of my grace remain with the one you now call your husband.” Christ did say, “Go, call thy husband, and come hither. The woman answered and said unto him, I have no husband. Jesus saith unto her, Thou saidst well, I have no husband: for thou hast had five husbands; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband: this hast thou said truly (John 4:16-18). The Bible teaches it is “repent or perish” (Luke 13:3), not remain in adultery and be covered by God’s grace!

3) *“Then finally, at ACU, I began to understand that the kingdom of God is bigger than we realize.”* Atchley then refers to the incident in Mark 9:38-40 and declares, *“It took me a while, but I finally understood that just because someone is not ‘one of us’ doesn’t mean they are not one of Christ’s. It will never again be my agenda to oppose anybody who is doing good in the name of Jesus.”*

The one who did not follow the apostles was simply not one of them. It is obvious he was not a false teacher or member of a denomination. First, he cast out demons, a power given to the apostles (Mark 3:15) and seventy others (Luke 10:1ff). Second, Jesus commended his work, thus, he could not have been a false teacher.

Atchley and ACU believe the kingdom of God is bigger than the Lord’s church! Obviously, Atchley and his followers desire to fellowship those who “abideth not in the doctrine/teaching of Christ.” The faithful will not partake of his “evil works” (II John 10-11). Atchley should study instead of “glance” at the Holy Scriptures!

1272 Bonham St. Paris, TX 75460

NOTE: Rick Atchley and the Richland Hills Church of Christ in Richland Hills, Texas, has introduced mechanical instruments of music into their worship and have also included a worship service wherein they observe the Lord’s supper on Saturday. Please pray that Rick, the elders and the whole church will see the error of their