

Why Is There Chaff in My Wheat?

And Why Is Revival So Messy?

Rockey Jackson - March 30, 2001

Section 5 of 9

Are We Building the Kingdom of God?

*Inventors are different, don't you know,
They're thinking of new things wherever they go.
They'll use doodads, widgets, and thingamajigs,
Many just once because they're temporary rigs,
To make what they see in their minds eye,
Many wonderful things for both you and I.*

In the western world today our technology, wealth, and industrial might have freed us in most cases from the necessities of growing our own food, making our own clothes, and building our own homes. Often if we do one of these things for ourselves, it is considered a hobby or pastime but certainly not work. Though most of us have jobs and are productive with our lives, we tend to be compartmentalized into some little niche. We rarely see the big picture of even the product we help to produce. No matter what industry we're in, we usually feel like workers on an assembly line doing one simple task over and over again. As individuals we're isolated from many of the realities of agriculture, manufacturing, and construction. It wasn't that way only a short time ago. Before the industrial revolution there were only a few professional specialties. What wasn't made in the home was almost always made no farther away than the local community. We may not have been, let's say, a blacksmith, but from time to time we would have watched the local blacksmith as he worked.

Many of the teachings and illustrations in the Bible are drawn from the everyday work of providing the necessities of life: food, clothing, and shelter. Because we're unfamiliar with many of these realities, I often wonder if our interpretations aren't one dimensional and lacking in depth. In his first letter to the church in Corinth, the Apostle Paul gave the believers this instruction about building the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ:

"For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire" 1 Cor. 3:11-15.

It is clear from this passage that we should strive to build things that will endure. Who would want to waste their time building something that will only burn up? We want a reward for our effort, but is our interpretation too shallow? The Bible tells us in Romans 1:20 that God has also placed revelation in the creation. Only a few generations ago, studying the nature of God's creation was actually referred to as studying God's other book. So let's take a look at some

realities of God's creation to see if we can deepen our understanding of the way desirable things are produced.

Back on the ranch we grew crops and we also raised beef. Usually a calf was kept for about eighteen months and then it was sold to a feedlot for finishing before going to a meatpacking plant. Now each year we kept one steer to butcher for ourselves. In the last two or three months we fed the steer a mixture of corn and other good stuff to improve the texture and flavor of the meat. When the steer reached a finished weight of about one thousand pounds, he was slaughtered and butchered. We then wrapped and froze the meat so we could use it throughout the year. Depending on how much bone and fat we left with the meat, that thousand pound steer would give us about four hundred pounds of hamburger, steaks, and roasts. The rest was wasted in the steer's head, hide, hooves, tail, and entrails. That's a 60 percent loss from the standing weight. Now as ranchers we didn't curse the head, hide, and hooves. We knew that they were a necessary part of the package we raised our beef in. Can you imagine a rancher trying to separate his calves from their heads, hides, and entrails right after they were born? He wouldn't be in the business of ranching very long.

*Could you ever imagine a rancher so nuts
That he only wants beef not heads, hides, and guts?
It seems very clear, if we want to eat meat,
We better start raising some heads, hides, and feet.*

Most of us don't make our own clothes today - we shop for them. Now I've never learned how to sew or make my own clothes, but my mother, my wife, and my mother-in-law are all competent seamstresses. Over the years I've watched many a bolt of cloth become dresses, blouses, shirts, and other useful articles of clothing. They each have their sewing machines and boxes filled with many doodads and helps along with scissors, needles, and all colors of thread. As each project begins they make quite a mess, with patterns and miscellaneous pieces of cloth strung around the house (with each of them dropping some threads). To my untrained eye it's chaos. I can't tell a piece of a dress from what's nothing more than a leftover scrap of cloth. They, however, understand what they're doing, and little by little they sew piece to piece to make what they want: a dress, blouse, or shirt. Now after the project is finished, its pattern is carefully stored, but it seems with each new project they always buy more! Can you imagine the dresses a seamstress would make if she refused to cut cloth because of the scraps it would create or what her dress would look like if she refused to buy a pattern because it was of no use after the dress was made? Would we call that a fashion statement or just laugh as we walked away? Now a seamstress doesn't curse her patterns used just once or the scraps and threads she throws away because she knows that they're necessary to the clothes she makes.

*Can you imagine the dresses a seamstress would create
If she refused to cut cloth because of the scraps it would make?
It's certain indeed if we want new clothes to wear,
We'll have to put up with scraps here and there.*

Currently I work as a systems engineer at Lockheed Martin Aerospace in Denver, Colorado. We make mostly space launch vehicles (rockets) and satellites at our plant. The pictures that are

usually shown to the public have pieces of our hardware during final assembly in a “clean room” being attended to by people in protective suits. This gives the impression of a very sterile environment and very little waste, but before the various pieces of our spacecraft made it to final assembly they went through many processes that all caused waste. There was cutting, shaping; milling, and cleansing baths that left scraps, shavings, and hazardous waste. Special fixtures had to be built to hold the hardware while it was worked on. Test equipment and test facilities had to be built to see: if the hardware would perform as designed, if it could withstand the vibration of launch, and if it would still operate in the rigors of heat, cold, and the vacuum of space. Dollies and containers were needed to move and protect the hardware during transport. A nonfunctional pathfinder vehicle was built, exact in shape, weight, and attachments. It was shipped to the launch site ahead of the real vehicle and even stacked with the launch vehicle to test the logistics of the route and equipment. It would be very embarrassing to damage a billion dollar satellite by running it into a low bridge or letting it set out a night in the rain because the right hook was not on the crane. After the space vehicle has left for its journey in space, all this is left over as aerospace waste. I haven’t even mentioned yet the biggest thing that burns up. It’s one of our own finished products, the space launch vehicle. It can cost up to three hundred million dollars to give a satellite a ride up to its orbiting station. The rocket is burned up in just a few short minutes and it falls back to earth as a bunch of space junk! Can you imagine a telephone company executive who would have a communications satellite built but would refuse to pay for a rocket to launch it because they only burn up? I guess he could mount his satellite in the center of his corporate square as a monument to his stupidity. Aerospace engineers don’t mind the many tons of waste and discarded equipment they create. They know that each process and piece is specifically designed and absolutely necessary to make a satellite work and to put it in space.

*Satellites are amazing, all the things they can do;
On the other side of the world I can still talk to you.
But if we ever want our satellite in space,
We better start making some aerospace waste.*

Living in the convenience of our modern western world, we generally don’t build our own homes. We buy a finished house that may be new or used, and then we just move in. Usually we never have to think about the process it took to build that house for us. When my parents retired from the scout ranch, they bought for their retirement home an old house in Elbert that had been abandoned for many years. It was in obvious disrepair and the yard, with bushes and weeds everywhere, had more in common with an overgrown jungle than a manicured lawn. The first time my parents showed me this “treasure” they’d found, I was really quite shocked. All I could think was, “Who would ever want to live here?” The plaster was cracked and the colors were dreary. The ceilings were high. The floor coverings were worn and covered over with mouse tracks. The kitchen was a sight with all the cabinet doors cracked. The electrical supply belonged in a museum. A single bare hot wire ran down one side of the attic, and a single bare ground wire ran down the other side. They were attached to the rafters with ceramic insulators. Wires were dropped to the various outlets and switches from these supply wires in the attic. Parts of the original water system were still there, a windmill behind the house raised water to a stock tank in the attic. The system in use when the house was last occupied consisted of a shallow well, a pressure tank, and an electric pump. The plumbing was all galvanized pipe that was rusting and clogged. I think that I’ll stop our tour right here. I don’t think you’d like me to descend the

basement stairs and graphically describe the horrible sights I saw there! It took my parents six months to get enough remodeling done to allow them to move into their new home and it was two years of hard work before they could really say they were done.

They tore all the plaster and lath down from the walls, finished some rooms with panels and others with dry wall. They lowered the ceilings and recovered the floors, replaced all the windows and even the doors. The kitchen cabinets were replaced by mom's design and dad cleaned out the basement; he really made it shine. They replaced pipes and wires all through the house, then new fixtures and appliances finished it out. The trash was removed, carried out lump by lump, and we lost count of the trips we made to the dump. That old house was painted, inside and out. That made it look better, without a doubt. A new well was drilled but that wouldn't do, they had to connect to the city's water and sewer too. The yard was cleared and the old trees were trimmed. Old roots were grubbed out and the lawn was put in. Three grown sons got to help their folks more than once or twice and it really was messy; it wasn't very nice. But when they were finished with all they could do, mom and dad had a house that was just like brand new.

In the end, I had to apologize to my parents for the negative attitude I had and comments I'd made about their house. I could only see what it was; I couldn't believe what it would become. Dad and mom weren't blind; they could see the condition the house was in, but they had a vision of what it could be with a little work and sweat. They saw a comfortable home, pretty and neat, that would shelter them in their last years both from the cold and the heat. My parents didn't shrink back from the work it would take and the mess it would make to turn their vision into reality. Today I would be proud to have that house as my home, a place to entertain family and friends of my own. Often times I wonder if we really know how to distinguish when the chaff is dry and ready to blow from the times when the chaff is green and the grass is still sweet, when it's only trying to tell us: "Get ready for some wheat!"

*Contractors don't mind the mess they make,
They know that it's for their building's sake.
If we want eternal value in the things we do,
We better be willing to make a mess too.*

I could go on and on with many more of these illustrations, but I hope by now I've made my point. We buy our food, clothing, homes, and most everything else ready made. About the only mess and waste we ever see is the packaging that our products come in. Yet almost every process in agriculture, manufacturing, and construction makes a mess and produces waste. The reality of God's creation shows us that if we want to produce desirable products, then we must be willing to work through the process, make some messes, and throw away the trash. Are we willing to put up with the mess and waste of producing things that have eternal value? Are we willing to make the temporary forms and structures, that will eventually burn up, so that we can use them to build the things that will last for eternity?