

19 Pietism and Rationalism

Right All the Time

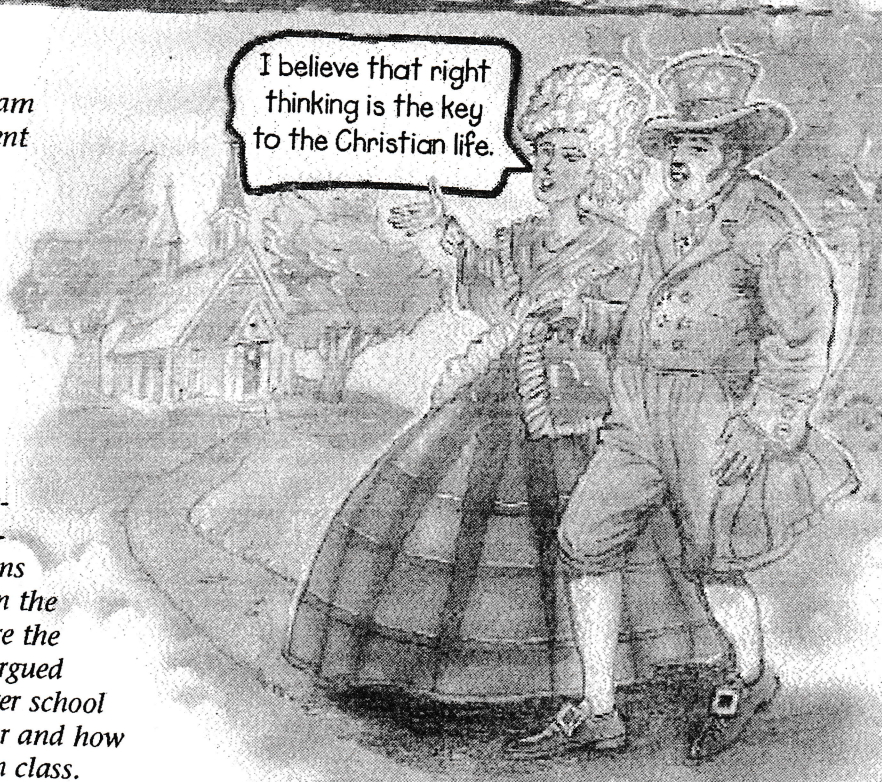
- Matt was sure that his favorite team would win the Super Bowl. He spent two weeks telling everyone in his class what a great team they were and how their opponent didn't stand a chance. Matt's team lost the game. The Monday after the game, Matt was saying how he knew all along that his team wouldn't win. Matt didn't like to be wrong.
- Sally got a 98 percent on the big history test, but she was still disappointed. Sally was a straight-A student and rarely missed any questions on a test. Sally had one question on the test marked wrong and she was sure the teacher had made a mistake. She argued with her teacher for 15 minutes after school about how the question was unclear and how that information was not covered in class. Sally didn't like to be wrong.

At times, all of us act like Matt and Sally. Why do you think people don't like to be wrong?

Rightness of Life, Rightness of Thought

When Orthodoxy, with its emphasis on right teaching, became a powerful force in the church, some Christians became concerned that religion was losing its effect on how people lived and that the church was growing cold. These people felt that "right living" was the most important part of the faith. This movement became known as Pietism. It began in Germany, but grew in popularity in Europe and North America.

Philipp Spener began the Pietistic Movement by calling for a German Lutheran "revival" so that people would lead more righteous lives, preaching would build people up in the faith, and lay people would be more involved in the life of the church. Pietists after Spener started groups called *con-*



I believe that right thinking is the key to the Christian life.

venticles, which were meetings of lay people to pray and study the Bible.

August Hermann Francke, a close friend of Spener, led a movement to care for the needs of society, forming institutions to help orphans, the elderly, and criminals. Pietists were active in establishing missions in India and North America. Christians who didn't attend the conventicles, however, were looked down upon by many Pietists. Pietists often suggested that they were the only *true* believers and others only pretended to be Christians. Other Pietists were so concerned that people turn from their sin that they rarely talked about forgiveness and, instead, focused on how God hates sin. For Pietists, the two most important parts of Christianity were right living and feeling that God was a part of a person's life.

In England, the Pietists were led by the two Wesley brothers: John (1703–91) and Charles (1707–88). The Wesleyan Movement became the Methodist Church. John Wesley was

known for his fiery sermons at English revivals. Charles was a famous hymn writer and wrote the words to hymns like "Hark! the Herald Angels Sing" and "Christ the Lord Is Risen Today."

Also in England were groups of Pietists who desired to break free from the established religion there. These groups, called Pilgrims and Puritans, came to North America to establish settlements where they could practice their Pietism without outside interference.

People who didn't care for Pietism were more concerned with right thinking than right living; many of them joined the movement in the European churches that became known as Rationalism. Rationalist pastors thought that right thinking was the way to happiness, so they began to apply reason to their understanding of the Bible. Eventually, they only accepted the parts of God's Word that made sense to them. Miracles, the inspiration of Scripture, and Jesus' resurrection didn't make sense to the Rationalists.

Rationalist pastors wanted to help make people's lives better through science, so they would preach on how important it was to take a bath regularly or the importance of crop rotation in farming. Some Rationalists did not baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but in the name of "reason, logic, and goodness."

The Pietists emphasized people; the Rationalists de-emphasized God. Rationalists opposed the idea of human sinful nature and of the need of humans to be saved by Christ. They stressed that individuals have the ability to do God's will on their own.

The Deists further extended the idea of people's ability to do good and to live a moral life. Deists were willing to accept the existence of God, but they refused to believe that God is lovingly active in our salvation. They thought of God as an impersonal, absentee landlord. Many of the founders of the United States were Deists. Although their writings sound religious and godly, the certainty and com-

fort of forgiveness and eternal life through Jesus are usually absent.

In 1817, on the 300th anniversary of Martin Luther's posting of the 95 Theses, many Lutherans came out against both Pietism and Rationalism. This new movement wanted a faith based on the Bible and not on emotions or intellect. Within Lutheranism, there was a renewed interest in the Lutheran Confessions and how they explain the teachings of the Bible. This movement became a new Orthodoxy because it wanted to return to the roots of Lutheran teaching.

On the Positive and Negative Sides

1. Most movements have both positive and negative aspects. What are some positive and negative results of Pietism?

[Redacted]

2. What are the positive and negative points of Rationalism?

[Redacted]

3. How can feelings trick us into thinking that we aren't saved?

[Redacted]

(142) or 3

To Review and Remember

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. *2 Timothy 3:16-17*