**SPIRITUAL VERTIGO**

***Flying by Feelings or Faith***

I will never forget the experience. I was 23 years old and preaching in Marvell, Arkansas. Charles Loeschner, a farmer and member of the church, invited me to go flying with him to oversee his thousands of acres of cotton and soybeans. I loved to fly, especially in those little two-seater Cessna’s that farmers often flew, so I jumped at the chance to go airborne.

We flew about 1000 feet or less above the fields, dipping down several times to get a closer look. After he was satisfied, he turned and said, “Want to fly the plane?” Excitedly, and foolishly, I said, “Yeah!” as I pictured myself a Top Gun in an F-14 Phantom jet. I grabbed control of the stick and headed off into the wild blue yonder. It seemed so easy. Everything went just fine. I was a “pilot” – flying like a bird.

Charles soon turned to me and asked, “Do you want to be an astronaut?” Curious as to the question, I replied, “Why do you ask?” He said, “Because you soon will be, for you are ascending at a north by northwest altitude, and at this direction you will reach outer space in a short time.”

What? That can’t be. I’m flying straight as an arrow. I just “knew” we were level as I looked out over the horizon. He calmly said, “Don’t believe me? Check your altimeter and compass.” Sure enough, my senses told me we were perpendicular to the ground, but the instruments said we would soon be astronauts (and dead ones at that, having no oxygen masks and certainly no pressurized cabin).

Pilots call this sensation of being disoriented “Vertigo.” Looking out the cockpit window is not the safest way to fly. A simple reading of the history of flying reveals that many a pilot lost their life by thinking they were horizontal, only to discover too late that they were disoriented and plunging to their death. Pilots must learn to trust their instruments, not their feelings.

Spiritually, far too many people are “flying by feelings.” To put it Biblically, they are “*walking by sight*” instead of by faith – 2 Cor. 5:7). They are trusting to their gut instead of to their God. They just “know” they are right in the eyes of God, without checking the instrument panel (the Bible) for verification. They have Spiritual Vertigo.

Solomon described it in Proverbs 14:12 in these words: “*There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death*.” Jeremiah said the same thing but in a different way: “*It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps*” (10:23).

The Bible character of Apollos is a great example of one with Spiritual Vertigo. He was “*an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures…instructed in the way of the Lord*.” Luke also says he was “*fervent in spirit*.” All in all we would label Apollos as a perfect preacher. Yet the story continues by saying, in effect, he was flying blind on the doctrine of baptism. He thought he was right, but Aquila and Priscilla, humble tentmakers, pointed out he was not checking his instrument panel (Truth). Thankfully, he caught his mistake before it was too late, corrected his course, and safely landed in heaven, taking many “passengers” with him (see Acts 18:24 – 19:5).

I remember back on January 18, 1982 (I was 30 years old), during an Air Show training session, the Air Force Thunderbirds were practicing what they called the “Diamond Formation” in which they fly in a diamond shape only inches from wingtip to wingtip. The lead pilot controls everything with the other three following him blindly. The maneuver has them climb several thousand feet into the air, pull over in a slow inside loop, then descend at more than 400 miles per hour. They were meant to level off at about 100 feet, but never did. On this fateful day they all followed him to their death, crashing simultaneously into the ground in Nevada. Speculation was that the lead pilot possibly had Vertigo and lost his bearings. How tragic.

But far worse than the physical deaths of those four pilots is the spiritual deaths of millions who follow false teachers blindly. Far too many walk by feelings and not by faith. Walking by faith comes by hearing God’s Word (Rom. 10:17). Walking by feelings comes by hearing others tell you what you want to hear (2 Tim. 4:3-4). You “feel” they are telling you the truth without verifying it by the Scriptures. In essence, you are “flying blind” and will soon plunge to your death as you “*do what is right in your own eyes*” (Judg. 21:25).

Charles Loeschner, that cotton farmer and amateur pilot, taught me a very valuable spiritual lesson that day over the skies of eastern Arkansas. In life, as well as in faith, you can’t always trust your feelings to tell you the truth. As Ronald Reagan used to say to the Soviet Union leaders who told him they were going to strictly follow the nuclear freeze and downsize their arsenal of warheads: “Trust, but verify.” Spiritually, there is no harm in trusting our instincts, but then double-check them by verifying them with a “thus says the Lord” book-chapter-and-verse reading. I like that, “trust, but verify.”

Aeronautical Vertigo can be tragic. Spiritual Vertigo is far more deadly. It is forever.

“*Speak Lord, thy servant hears*.” Now that’s flying by faith! - Rick