ANOTHER "CHAMPION" RUNS FOR THE HILLS!

Alan Highers is a prominent church of Christ minister, and the editor of the *Spiritual Sword* journal, out of Memphis, Tennessee. He is an experienced debater as well. In the October 2004 issue of the *Spiritual Sword*, Highers chronicled his own debate experience, as well as other significant polemic exchanges between members of the churches of Christ and other denominations. Highers hails the value of public formal debates, and laments the fact that there are so few such encounters in modern times.

When the *Spiritual Sword* with this information came to my attention, I passed it along to John Anderson, of Lighthouse World Ministries, with whom I work very closely. Anderson hosts a four hour, world-wide radio program each Sunday evening, and I am privileged to be a regular part of that program. Anderson and I decided that based on Highers' belief in the value of debating, that this would provide a prime opportunity to invite him to debate me, Don Preston, either in a formal public setting, or on Anderson's radio program.

Consequently, Anderson and I drafted a letter to Mr. Highers inviting him to meet me in formal public debate. I should note at this juncture that I warned Anderson in advance that Highers would refuse our invitation, and that he, Anderson, would be amazed at the arrogance that he would see in Higher's response. I told Anderson that in the churches of Christ, there is a mentality that if they do not deem an issue important, then, it is simply not important. Furthermore, I informed Anderson that Highers was probably blissfully unaware of the rapid growth of Covenant Eschatology in the world, and would use that as an excuse to refuse a debate. Frankly, Anderson was somewhat skeptical of what I was telling him. However, these are my brethren, and I know them well! As it turns out, Anderson discovered that I was, lamentably, right on all counts.

In response to our initial challenge, Highers exhibited an alarming arrogance. His use of sarcasm toward someone he had never met was disturbing. He refused the invitation to meet me in a public formal debate, citing the fact that in the early 90s he had attended a debate between William Bell and Steven Wiggins, in Memphis. The attendance of that debate was not as hoped, to be sure. Highers insisted that so far as he is concerned, based on that experience, Covenant Eschatology is a non-issue, and not worth his time. After all, he has had debates in which thousands of people attended, therefore, if no one is interested, why debate?

Anderson and I discussed the situation and responded to Highers.
As a demonstration of Highers' arrogance, and desperation, he seemed to think that since Anderson and I collaborated on the letters to him that there is something sinister or wrong with that! Just exactly what would be wrong he never says. He just snidely says things like, "You write a good letter, or whoever writes your letter for you."

As of this writing, I cannot say whether the Memphis School of Preaching still sponsors those mock debates. What I can say, from personal contact with some of the former students who participated in those encounters, is that even those "mock debates" led to some of the students embracing Covenant Eschatology!
Memphis School of Preaching wrote a book on the issue, calling preterists heretics. And yes, Highers knows Curtis Cates. Wayne Jackson, a regular speaker with Highers on the Getwell church of Christ lectures, also wrote a book against the A.D. 70 doctrine. Perhaps Jackson did not tell Highers about the book, or, perhaps Highers should tell Jackson that he should not have wasted his time on such an inconsequential doctrine that no one is interested in! Robert Taylor, prominent minister in the churches of Christ, and regular speaker on the Getwell Lectures, has written some lengthy articles addressing Covenant Eschatology. Highers knows him well. Dub McClish, former minister of the Pearl Avenue church of Christ, and host of the Denton Lectures for years, thought enough of the issue to highly recommend Cates' book, and to have him speak against Covenant Eschatology on the lectureship. Terry Varner, from Ohio, has written and lectured extensively condemning advocates of Covenant Eschatology.

We could go on naming names. However, the point is that Highers knows and esteems virtually all of these men. Rest assured that Highers knows that Jackson and Cates wrote books on the issue. Highers knows that the topic has been discussed on church of Christ lectures. Highers says he does not know any preachers who consider it important enough to discuss. Yet, all of these men, and others, have written books and articles, have spoken at seminars, or hosted seminars where the topic was discussed and soundly condemned.

Realizing that Highers was so adamant in his refusal to debate me in a formal setting, Anderson and I then drafted a letter to Highers proposing that on a given Sunday night, Anderson would devote an entire four hours of programming to the discussions. We pointed out to Highers that Anderson's program is one of the fastest growing Christian radio talk shows in the world. He is currently aired on over 80 stations, with more stations being added

If Covenant Eschatology is serious enough of an issue to justify the charge of "heresy" and "heretic" one would think that a love for the souls of those caught up in the "heresy" would be sufficient enough reason for a debate. This is just another aspect of the hypocrisy of those like Highers, Cates and others. They throw stones and accusations against fellow believers, yet they refuse to defend their charges, or allow those they accuse of heresy to defend themselves! Sadly, this is also true with others. R. C. Sproul Jr., John MacArthur, Kenneth Gentry, Jonathan Seriah, and others commonly make the "heresy" accusation, but do not exhibit the courage to publically defend their charges. The later named men, in contradistinction to Highers who is blissfully unaware of what is happening in the religious world, are well aware that preterism is growing rapidly, and have written and spoken extensively against it. So, here is a "heresy" that is spreading rapidly, making inroads virtually everywhere, and yet these "defenders of the faith" refuse to openly discuss it, choosing instead to pontificate from their ivory towers.

E. G. Freed-Hardeman University, Harding University to name but two.
virtually every month. On February 27th alone, 47 new stations signed on! Listeners from over 29 countries regularly listen to The Voice of Reason. We thus pointed out to Highers: "So, while you say that you have conducted debates where there were as many as one thousand people present, The Voice of Reason has a potential audience of millions of people. Very clearly, on The Voice of Reason, you would possibly be speaking to the largest audience you have ever addressed." What was Highers' response? Here is what he wrote: "You make all the best excuses for the lack of interest in the debate in Memphis, and you state the very best scenario for engaging in a debate on a subject that interests most people as much as the number of angels who can balance on the head of a pin."

So there you have it! In spite of the fact that The Voice of Reason is growing at an incredible rate, and that growth is, at least partly, because of the presentation of Covenant Eschatology, Mr. Alan Highers has pontificated and decreed that no one is interested! End of story! The subject will not be debated.

Highers demonstrates several things in his response.

First, he shows that he is woefully ignorant of the incredible present day interest in eschatology. Is he even aware of Time and Life magazines that have run feature stories on the current fascination with eschatology? Has he ever heard of the Left Behind series? Does he know of, "The Last Disciple" by Hanegraff? One can only wonder if Highers is aware of the plethora of books written to refute Covenant Eschatology, When Shall These Things Be: A Reformed Response to Hyper-Preterism, (Mathison), The End times Controversy, (LaHaye/Ice) The Anti-Prophets, (Spargimino), The Second Coming (MacArthur), etc.? Is Highers so blissfully out of touch that he does not know that all of these authors state that Covenant Eschatology is spreading like wild fire?

Second, Highers has shown that he is willing to distort the facts. To suggest that none of the preachers that he knows consider Covenant Eschatology to be of any importance is simply false, as proven by all the books and lectures written by his preaching acquaintances! If the issue is of no interest, and no importance, why schedule lectures to address it? Why write books to condemn it? Why stage mock debates to prepare men to engage an issue that holds no more interest than how many angels can dance on the top of a pin?

Third, Highers has shown that he is desperate to avoid open discussion of Covenant Eschatology. First, he says he will not debate because no one will come. Then, when offered an audience of perhaps millions of people, he says they are not interested! This last fact is perhaps the most revealing of all. How Highers is able
It is interesting that I have been contacted no less than three times over the last two years, by individuals convinced that Jackson would debate me, and asking my permission to issue a challenge to him. I naturally granted permission immediately, forewarning the individuals that Jackson would refuse. One individual said Jackson would never refuse such an invitation! He was wrong. Jackson continues to give the same lame excuse for not debating me: I have no standing in the preterist community. He makes this excuse even though I have debated some of the top evangelicals, i.e. Harold Hoehner, Thomas Ice, C. Marvin Pate, James Jordan, etc., including F. LaGard Smith, a very prominent church of
Christ minister with ever bit as much "standing" in the churches of Christ as Jackson. What is interesting and significant is that Max King wrote a letter some years ago, urging Jackson to debate me, and recommending me as a qualified representative of Covenant Eschatology. Jackson ignored the letter, even though, in the case of Walter Martin, cited above, Martin ignored a similar letter from leading church of Christ ministers recommending Jackson for debate. Jackson blasted Martin saying that it was obvious that he was less than honorable. The point is that there is a direct parallel between the Jackson-V-Martin challenge and rejection, and the Jackson-V-Preston challenge and rejection. Jackson condemned and ridiculed Martin for his actions, yet Jackson repeated Martin's actions almost to the letter!

We cannot "name names" here, but one very prominent seminary professor has recently stated to John Anderson that the rapid growth of preterism means that "a major debate on this topic needs to take place." He stated that he is very much in favor of such a debate, and has urged us to pursue it with the head of the seminary.

The fact is that if I were espousing premillennialism, or postmillennialism even, men such as Highers, Jackson, and others would be debating each other for the right to debate me, or others. There is one reason why Highers, Jackson and other so-called defenders of the faith will not enter the polemic fray in regard to the A.D. 70 parousia of Christ, and that is because they realize that they cannot defeat it! Their amillennialism is fundamentally and fatally flawed, and as a former "insider" who espoused that view, I know whereof I speak.

I have followed the writings of these men virtually all of their careers, and I never throw anything away! I know that Jackson for instance, has argued that "at hand" means well, "at hand"! It cannot mean 2000 years! Thus, I can document from his own writings, that his current attempts to negate the time statements of the NT are self-contradictory. In the past he has affirmed that you cannot ignore the "at hand" statements. Now, however, when writing against Covenant Eschatology, he wants us to forget everything he has ever said about "at hand" meaning near and soon. Instead, time statements are suddenly "elastic, relative and subjective." This kind of embarrassing self-contradiction would be fully exposed in public debate.

There is good news and bad news. The bad news is that my brethren in the churches of Christ are showing themselves to be less than honorable in regard to their own history, and their own preaching. It is easy to see that Highers has acted less than honorably in regard to our invitation. To refuse an invitation for a debate with a world wide audience, based on the lame excuse that no one is interested, is disingenuous at the very best. The good news is that there are others, from differing fellowships, that give more than lip service to the value of open discussions. They realize that Covenant Eschatology is in fact growing rapidly; it is spreading across all denominational boundaries. It needs to be discussed. Consequently, some of the leading evangelicals have agreed to, and
engaged in respectful and honorable discussions. We have engaged in discussion on *The Voice of Reason* with men such as Harold Hoehner, professor at Dallas Theological Seminary. C. Marvin Pate, of Moody Bible Institute, with professor and author Randall Price, F. LaGard Smith, and others. This is not to mention the excellent formal discussions with the noted reformed theologian James Jordan, and the formal discussions with Thomas Ice and Mark Hitchcock, that John Anderson and I shared two years ago.

You see, there are still men that truly believe in honorable formal dialogue. They don't just write brag sheets about it, they step up to the platform and present their case. These are the men that we appreciate and there are more like them on the horizon. Other high level discussions are being planned, and Lord willing, will occur. So, while there are those braggarts who speak of their debate exploits and the need for debating, but who refuse to actually engage in debate (another man by the name of Van Impe comes to mind here!), there are others who truly believe what they say, and are willing to come together to openly and respectfully discuss the issues at hand. We look forward to that kind of discussion with honorable believers.