

*Don't  
Widen  
The Plate*



## A New Patch on an Old Garment

“Then He spoke a parable to them, ‘No one puts a piece from a new garment on an old one; otherwise the new makes a tear, and also the piece that was taken out of the new does not match the old.’” Luke 5:36

In the last issue of BC (Mar/Apr 2016) there were some things left out of some of the articles due to a mix up between versions of software used. It reminds me of the lesson Jesus taught about putting a new patch on an old garment. The new, unshrunk cloth tears away from the old and makes the tear worse. In this case we had a newer version of software used to compose the layout and then an older version of the same software used to print the issue. Earlier this year I purchased a new version of Microsoft Office for my laptop computer at home. When I composed the Mar/Apr

issue I used this new version of Microsoft Publisher. Of course, I still have the older version on my computer at the office and the print shop that prints BC still has the older version of Publisher, too. This particular issue I composed at home on my laptop. I double checked everything and then emailed the file to my print shop like I always do. I never noticed the articles had been cut off until I picked up the completed booklets and brought them home for mailing. I began scrambling around to see what happened. I opened the file up and it looked fine, but I still have a copy of the older version of Publisher on my laptop at home so I opened it up there and “bingo” I saw the problem. The newer version of Publisher places some of the help features in a different place on the page than the older version, so I know which version I am using now. Unless my print shop decides to upgrade I will need to keep com-

from where they need to be?

The book of Proverbs begins with this urgent warning: "My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent" (Proverbs 1:10). The first psalm also recognizes the tendency of young ones to follow others into sin: "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful" (Psalm 1:1). Was the psalmist writing about the dangers of television, video games or the Internet? He might have been.

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This danger of modern Pied Pipers means that good people have to be proactive. Rather than watching passively as sinful melodies lure our children from wholesome teachings, we must work hard to ground them. Paul gave a solution: "And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4). Doing that will require deliberate effort and the investment of quality time. But it must be done.

A Pied Piper must have been at work in the generation after Joshua led the Israelites into the Promised Land. Judges 2:10 says that "... another generation arose after them who did not know the Lord ..." No wonder that book reveals a nation in chaos.

Our children's souls are at stake. We have work to do before they are led away from us.

...Timothy D Hall  
Lightgrams, May 21, 2009

*“Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.”*

...Colossians 2:8

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## He Took Their Children

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Not too far from where I live is the headquarters for the International Storytelling Association. The telling of stories is nothing new but the appreciation of this art has seen a rebirth in recent years. A good story can be entertaining, but it can also be a means of conveying historical events. In such cases it may be hard to separate fact from fiction.

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One famous example is the story of the Pied Piper of Hamelin. This tale is found in the collection of stories by the Brothers Grimm and traces back at least to the 13th century. The plot is simple: The town of Hamelin, Germany was suffering from an overabundance of rats. A man mysteriously appeared, offering to take care of the problem. The townspeople agreed, promising to pay him generously if he would only get rid of those pests.

The man, dressed in pied

(multicolored) clothing, began playing a flute. Rats began appearing from everywhere, following the flutist as he led them to the river. The tune kept playing as the rats leaped into the river to their deaths. When the townspeople reneged on their promise to pay the piper he began playing his flute again. This time it was their children he led out of their lives.

There may be fact behind this fiction. Records have been found lamenting the loss of 130 children from Hamelin. An entry into the town's records of 1284 says, "It is 10 years since our children left." Theories abound regarding what may have happened to those children. Was it disease, with death portrayed in pied clothing? Was it a Crusade that lured the children from their homes? No one knows for sure, but the theories cast a shadow over what has otherwise been a nice little fairy tale.

There's plenty of facts over which to be concerned in our modern world. You likely won't spot a man in pied clothing playing a flute with children following. But will you have any difficulty finding others whose influence is leading young ones away

posing in the older version. The new patch on the old garment definitely does not work, any more than new wine in old wine-skins would work.

I am going to put a "patch" on that last issue in this May/June issue. I will give you the portions of the articles that were left off in the last issue. You may have noticed in the last issue that none of the articles had names at the end. They were cut off. So here are the patches:

"Fresh and Flouring" p. 4: A time of refreshing from the Lord when those of all generations will believe that an humble obedience in the Father's house is far better than all the enticements of the far country.

...lsg

"In Memory of Those Gone and in Honor of Those Present" p. 8: We are always asking the Lord to heal our bodies when we are sick. Should we not be more interested in asking the Lord to humble us when we feel so self-sufficient and grant us the will to obey what the Word says.

THANKFUL FOR OUR ELDERLY

Let us give thanks for the wisdom the experience and fortitude

of the elderly that we still have with us and for the work left us by those that have gone to meet their reward. There is no field of human endeavor in which we have not profited by their labors. May we be like those who lived a life of humility which enabled them to obey your word. Let us do what our hands find to do as we serve in the Kingdom of Jesus Christ our Lord.

...Ralph D. Gage (1915-2005)

"For Future Generations" p. 11: It is just as Isaiah declared long ago: "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever" (Isaiah 40:8).

...Timothy D. Hall  
Lightgrams 11/12/2009

That is the end of the patch and I hope that it will complete what you thought sounded a little incomplete in the last issue. I also pray that I can keep my version of Publisher in sync with my print shop in the future.

I received an email from Darrell Thomas recently that was a forward of a baseball story. I read the story and then wrote back asking if Darrell knew the source of the story. I told him I would like to use the story but I wanted to research it. Darrell

wrote back and had done the research for me. It is a baseball story but it has some implications that are relevant to current conditions in our society. I am using it because it reminds us that there is a North Star that is constant and dependable. When we chart our course using the North Star we are safe and can know where our voyage is leading us. While other stars' apparent positions in the sky change throughout the night, as they appear to rotate around the celestial poles, pole stars' apparent positions remain virtually fixed. This makes them especially useful in celestial navigation: they are a dependable indicator of the direction toward the respective geographic pole although not exact; they are virtually fixed, and their angle of elevation can also be used to determine latitude. There are some truths that are constant and dependable and we can rely on these principles to navigate the seas of life.

...lsg

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*“Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and your law is truth”*

*...Psalm 119:142*

*“Sanctify them by your truth. Your word is truth.*

*...John 17:17*

*“Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever...”*

*...1 Peter 1:22-23*

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have taken advantage of young children, only to have such an atrocity swept under the rug for years. Our church leaders are widening home plate!”

I was amazed. At a baseball convention where I expected to learn something about curveballs and bunting and how to run better practices, I had learned something far more valuable. From an old man with home plate strung around his neck, I had learned something about life, about myself, about my own weaknesses and about my responsibilities as a leader. I had to hold myself and others accountable to that which I knew to be right, lest our families, our faith, and our society continue down an undesirable path.

“If I am lucky,” Coach Scolinos concluded, “you will remember one thing from this old coach today. It is this: if we fail to hold ourselves to a higher standard, a standard of what we know to be right; if we fail to hold our spouses and our children to the same standards, if we are unwilling or unable to provide a consequence when they do not meet the standard; and if our schools and churches and our government fail to hold themselves accountable to those they serve, there is but one thing to look forward to ...”

With that, he held home plate in front of his chest, turned it around, and revealed its dark black backside. “... dark days ahead.”

Coach Scolinos died in 2009 at the age of 91, but not before touching the lives of hundreds of players and coaches, including mine. Meeting him at my first ABCA convention kept me returning year after year, looking for similar wisdom and inspiration from other coaches. He is the best clinic speaker the ABCA has ever known because he was so much more than a baseball coach.

His message was clear: “Coaches, keep your players — no matter how good they are — your own children, and most of all, keep yourself at seventeen inches.”

He was, indeed, worth the airfare.

Written by Chris Sperry

<http://www.sperrybaseballlife.com/stay-at-17-inches/>

“RIGHT! And in the Major Leagues, how wide home plate is in the Major Leagues?”

“Seventeen inches!”

“SEV-EN-TEEN INCHES!” he confirmed, his voice bellowing off the walls. “And what do they do with a Big League pitcher who can’t throw the ball over seventeen inches?” Pause. “They send him to Pocatello!” he hollered, drawing raucous laughter.

“What they don’t do is this: they don’t say, ‘Ah, that’s okay, Jimmy. You can’t hit a seventeen-inch target? We’ll make it eighteen inches, or nineteen inches. We’ll make it twenty inches so you have a better chance of hitting it. If you can’t hit that, let us know so we can make it wider still, say twenty-five inches.’”

Pause.  
“Coaches ...”

Pause.  
” ... what do we do when our best player shows up late to practice? When our team rules forbid facial hair and a guy shows up unshaven? What if he gets caught drinking? Do we hold him accountable? Or do we change the rules to fit him, do we widen home plate?”

The chuckles gradually faded as four thousand coaches grew quiet, the fog lifting as the old coach’s message began to unfold. He turned the plate toward himself and, using a Sharpie, began to draw something. When he turned it toward the crowd, point up, a house was revealed, complete with a freshly drawn door and two windows. “This is the problem in our homes today. With our marriages, with the way we parent our kids. With our discipline. We don’t teach accountability to our kids, and there is no consequence for failing to meet standards. We widen the plate!”

Pause. Then, to the point at the top of the house he added a small American flag.

“This is the problem in our schools today. The quality of our education is going downhill fast and teachers have been stripped of the tools they need to be successful, and to educate and discipline our young people. We are allowing others to widen home plate! Where is that getting us?”

Silence. He replaced the flag with a Cross.

“And this is the problem in the Church, where powerful people in positions of authority

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## Don’t Widen the Plate

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In Nashville, Tennessee, during the first week of January, 1996, more than 4,000 baseball coaches descended upon the Opryland Hotel for the 52nd annual ABCA convention. Nineteen times since, many of the same professional, college, high school, youth, and a slew of international coaches from passionate and developing baseball nations have gathered at various convention hotels across the country for two-and-half days of clinic presentations and industry exhibits. Sure, many members of the American Baseball Coaches Association have come and gone in those years; the leadership has been passed, nepotistically, from Dave Keilitz to his son, Craig; and the association — and baseball, in general — has lost some of its greatest coaches, including Rod Dedeaux, Gordie Gillespie, and Chuck “Bobo” Brayton.

I have attended all but three conventions in those nineteen years, and I have enjoyed and benefited from each of them. But ’96 was special — not just because it was held in the home of country music, a town I’d always wanted to visit. And not because I was attending my very first convention. Nashville in ’96 was special because it was there and then that I learned that baseball

— the thing that had brought 4,000 of us together — was merely a metaphor for my own life and those of the players I hoped to impact.

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While I waited in line to register with the hotel staff, I heard other more veteran coaches rumbling about the lineup of speakers scheduled to present during the weekend. One name, in particular, kept resurfacing, always with the same sentiment — “John Scolinos is here? Oh man, worth every penny of my airfare.”

Who the h\*\*\* is John Scolinos, I wondered. No matter, I was just happy to be there.

Having sensed the size of the group during check-in, I woke early the next morning in order to ensure myself a good seat near the stage — first chair on the right side of the center aisle, third row back — where I sat, alone, for an hour until the audio

-visual techs arrived to fine-tune their equipment. The proverbial bee bee in a boxcar, I was surrounded by empty chairs in a room as large as a football field. Eventually, I was joined by other, slightly less eager, coaches until the room was filled to capacity. By the time Augie Garrido was introduced to deliver the traditional first presentation from the previous season's College World Series winner, there wasn't an empty chair in the room.

ABCA conventions have a certain party-like quality to them. They provide a wonderful opportunity to re-connect with old friends from a fraternal game that often spreads its coaches all over the country. As such, it is common for coaches to bail out of afternoon clinic sessions in favor of old friends and the bar. As a result, I discovered, the crowd is comparatively sparse after lunch, and I had no trouble getting my seat back, even after grabbing a plastic-wrapped sandwich off the shelf at the Opryland gift shop.

I woke early the next morning and once again found myself alone in the massive convention hall, reviewing my notes from the day before: pitching mechanics, hitting philosophy, team practice drills. All technical and

typical — important stuff for a young coach, and I was in Heaven. At the end of the morning session, certain that I had accurately scouted the group dynamic and that my seat would again be waiting for me after lunch, I allowed myself a few extra minutes to sit down and enjoy an overpriced sandwich in one of the hotel restaurants. But when I returned to the convention hall thirty minutes before the lunch break ended, not only was my seat not available, barely any seats were available! I managed to find one between two high school coaches, both proudly adorned in their respective team caps and jackets. Disappointed in myself for losing my seat up front, I wondered what had pried all these coaches from their barstools.

I found the clinic schedule in my bag: "1 PM John Scolinos, Cal Poly Pomona." It was the man whose name I had heard buzzing around the lobby two days earlier. Could he be the reason that all 4,000 coaches had returned, early, to the convention hall? Wow, I thought, this guy must really be good. I had no idea.

In 1996, Coach Scolinos was 78 years old and five years retired from a college coaching career that began in 1948. He shuffled

to the stage to an impressive standing ovation, wearing dark polyester pants, a light blue shirt, and a string around his neck from which home plate hung — a full-sized, stark-white home plate.

Seriously, I wondered, who in the h\*\*\* is this guy?

After speaking for twenty-five minutes, not once mentioning the prop hanging around his neck, Coach Scolinos appeared to notice the snickering among some of the coaches. Even those who knew Coach Scolinos had to wonder exactly where he was going with this, or if he had simply forgotten about home plate since he'd gotten on stage.

Then, finally ...  
"You're probably all wondering why I'm wearing home plate around my neck. Or maybe you think I escaped from Camarillo State Hospital," he said, his voice growing irascible. I laughed along with the others, acknowledging the possibility. "No," he continued, "I may be old, but I'm not crazy. The reason I stand before you today is to share with you baseball people what I've learned in my life, what I've learned about home plate in my 78 years."

Several hands went up when Scolinos asked how many Little League coaches were in the room. "Do you know how wide home plate is in Little League?" After a pause, someone offered, "Seventeen inches," more question than answer.

"That's right," he said. "How about in Babe Ruth? Any Babe Ruth coaches in the house?"

Another long pause. "Seventeen inches?" came a guess from another reluctant coach.

"That's right," said Scolinos. "Now, how many high school coaches do we have in the room?" Hundreds of hands shot up, as the pattern began to appear. "How wide is home plate in high school baseball?"

"Seventeen inches," they said, sounding more confident.

"You're right!" Scolinos barked. "And you college coaches, how wide is home plate in college?"

"Seventeen inches!" we said, in unison.

"Any Minor League coaches here? How wide is home plate in pro ball?"

"Seventeen inches!"