

Lessons Learned

No, this is not about something expressly Scriptural or Biblical. However, if you want, you could take some serious spiritual application from it.

I started designing (I'll use the term loosely here) web pages about four years ago. I launched the Reproach of Men site a little over three years ago after tinkering with HTML code for quite some time and produced a set of pages that passed for a site. It was all based on tables and more effort was expended in writing the introductions than in actually insuring the code was acceptable and usable by all the major browsers.

At the time, I thought it was rather neat that a page could be "elastic" and "liquid" to whatever width of monitor the user happened to have. Moreover, I thought that using different colors for different pages would be good as well. Ahh yes, a whole new way to be "creative" and still be plain enough to not be outlandish.

Live and learn.

You know, we are designed by the LORD God to function a certain way, and any other way, no matter how neat it may appear to be initially, simply does not work very well, if at all. A case in point is the ability to make a screen "liquid" to where it stretches to the limits of any monitor or browser window. The idea is great if you have tons of bandwidth and large graphics, or you really don't mind endlessly long lines. However, our eyes do not like endlessly long lines, and dial-up (which a significant portion of our population still uses) cannot handle large files. Hence, two very significant limitations on page elasticity. The worst part is that I really don't care for fixed-width, narrow screens. However, after having to deal with the vagaries of IE6, I was forced to concede to fixed-width for IE6 only, as IE6 and below do not

handle liquid very well at all. But, in so doing, I discovered that the narrower width window was actually easier to focus on and read. Something about setting a page in the middle of the screen, contrasting it with a background, and an appropriate (proportional) text size, made the article much easier to read.

Hmmm.

Well, I'm not stupid, and the whole idea is to get people to read the articles and learn. Hence, change all the articles to a maximum width of 800 pixels and define the page to the center of the window. Funny how it is so much easier to read. IE6 is still fixed width and the standards-compliant browsers get a liquid page from 400 to 800 pixels wide.

Since I also desire to have a page that is attractive and focuses the eye, I learned that there needs to be distinction in the layout. Using one solid color for the entire page really kills the eye and makes it harder to concentrate and focus on the separate areas of the page. Hence, a breakup of the page into functional areas is required to allow the eye to differentiate between those areas, and more effectively focus on a specific portion of the page. The requirements I had for my site were not too difficult:

The colors could not clash.

The colors could not be loud.

The colors had to reflect the simplicity of the Gospel message.

The distinction between the colors had to be sufficient to be clearly defining to the eye.

Hence, the colors are pastels, and somewhat contrasting, and thin lines are used to help complete the definition. Also, the colors are all "naturals" meaning they are "comfortable" to view. Moreover, all the different topical pages are laid out the same with the same colors and theme, with the exception of

the articles section. This also is a result of considerable learning about how we are when it comes to change.

Funny thing, we seem to like the variety, but variety from one page to the next in a website does not make for ease of use. Moreover, it does not inspire trust in the stability of the designer. I also limited the page width to 1200 pixels. So much for how I started out with the Reproach of Men site.

I consider it "lessons learned."