

Site Update

I have added a new page to the blog portion of the website in preparation for the change to a Content Management System for the website. I have been working on several themes in preparation of changing several sites and am also working on moving content from the static (HTML and XHTML) pages to a dynamic (PHP and MySQL) database driven website. This will ultimately allow me to focus more time on content, and less on coding and markup of the pages. One of the first benefits of this can be seen on the new [Audio – Lessons and Preaching page](#). The page has the traditional hypertext links to the MP3 files, PLUS it has an embedded media player that you can simply click on and it will automatically begin playing the file.

I will still maintain the old static pages and copy content to those pages for the older browsers. But, I will not “dress them up” and spend incredible amounts of time on them. That stated, enjoy the new page – there are several lessons and messages there already.

[Audio – Lessons and Preaching](#)

In Christ,

Paul W. Davis

A Problem Resolved – (Or should be)

I use an extension for WordPress (plugin) called Subscribe2

that automatically sends e-mails of the posts written, when they are published. However, since I upgraded to version 2.7 of WordPress, the plugin has been sending the HTML e-mail version with the background image of the blog. That would not be so bad, except the background image is dark purple and the text is black.

It makes for really nice reading, but only if your vision is somewhere in the near UV or UV range.

I have been doing the proverbial banging my head against the wall trying to think of a solution that would work, and not break the blog. Since I am not a “script kiddie” or a PHP whiz, this took a bit of time.

What I figured was the plugin had to be picking up the <body> callout in the CSS file and utilizing the graphic and background color defined there. I figured this had to be the case since I have background images for the sidebar and post, and it never picks that image up. However, that image is the background for the <div> that wraps the content of the post page.

Hmmmmm. . .

Hence, the solution would have to lie in wrapping the entire blog template with a <div> and then removing the background color and graphic from the <body> of the HTML document and applying it to the <div>. Since I maintain a development and testing blog, I tried it. After all, if I trash the development blog it really is no big deal and I will simply wipe it out and start over. Apparently, it worked. This post is the first post with the reworked Template and CSS files.

Thus, if your e-mail of the post is unreadable, drop me a line and I will rework the solution. But, I think it will work as it did on the Dev. blog.

IE 6 Quirks

Ahhh, Internet Explorer 6. The web browser that is not a browser.

After having worked on the design of this blog, and getting it correct in IE6, I (wrongfully) assumed that the alignment and fit of the content and sidebar would stay correct. I finished working the last few things and checked it with Firefox and let it go.

Mistake.

I checked it in IE6 and somehow, the sidebar was shoved too far left and floating below the content, despite being instructed to float right.

Grrrrr.

The problem is that IE6 contains a quirk (one of IE6's many bugs) that doubles the margins and padding if both left and right margins/padding are set. So, what should have been 15 pixels on the right side, was now 30 pixels spacing.

Nice. I really appreciate the folks at Microsoft for this bug that should have been caught in testing, or should have had a bug fix issued on it when it was brought to their attention.

Amazing. Microsoft wants to dominate the Internet, and can't program a piece of software that renders a page correctly, and won't issue a fix, and won't retract the bad program. No, their solution is to issue IE7 (which also has page rendering problems) and complain that everyone else is not right.

Typical spoiled brat behavior.

Anyway, I fixed the problem, and now it actually does look good in IE6.

New Theme

I finally got around to reworking a new theme for the blog that is more in line with the design of the rest of the website. There are still a couple of tweaks to accomplish, but I am largely done with the redesign.

This theme is also more accessible to those folks who do not have the larger, higher resolution screens. It is fixed width at 800 pixels, and looks good in IE6 on up.

Enjoy.

An Uncooperative Tool

Running and managing a blog is an interesting exercise in patience, particularly when that blog is in your own web space and you are solely responsible for all the management, housekeeping and troubleshooting of the problems that can occur when it is upgraded, features are added, etc.

Recently, I upgraded the software that runs the blog, turned all the added features back on, and tried to post. The posting part went well, but the e-mail notifications of the posts didn't occur like they were supposed to. After considerable troubleshooting, it was narrowed down to a server issue of indeterminate origin. The author of the feature (called a

“plugin”) that allows the automatic e-mails, had developed a workaround as my problem is not that uncommon. Apparently there are quite a few web hosts that have interesting server configurations.

For now, the problem is resolved and the e-mailer is working. Some of you will have received a “test post” notification. Kindly delete it. Hopefully, I will not have to go through this again, but I kind of think that is like hoping the sun won’t rise tomorrow. But, for now, it’s fixed.

Blog Issues

Of late I have had some issues with the comments and how comments are handled by the blog. Out of the blue I found comments on older posts turned off, comment moderation turned on for all posts, and “login prior to comment” turned on.

In researching the issue, I found this to be not unusual and related to one of the plugins interacting with the theme. I manually turned comment moderation off and opened up the comments again (no login required), but will have to tweak the MySQL database to fix the “comments off” issue. Then I am going to have to find out which plugin is affecting the theme.

However, it is not all a bad thing as I need to make the blog theme more closely match the theme of the rest of the website. This would also include upgrading the theme to work with the updated versions of WordPress.

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.”

Bugs

Sometimes, “Default” is really the only way to really make something work. Since I use WordPress, and it is “free” all the responsibility for making sure it works correctly falls upon my shoulders. I must do all the testing, all the modifications, and if I mess it up, then I have no one to blame but myself.

So it is with “permalinks” and changing them. I thought it would be somewhat better to change the permanent links to the articles to make them a bit more friendly (instead of just numbers), and instead, I found out that it rendered most of the blog inaccessible. I found “**404 – page not found**” errors on almost all the blog.

Sigh, grumble.

Convert back to “Default” link structure.

Guess I will bring it up to the authors and creators of WordPress and see what they say.

At least the blog is now accessible again.

Remember, nothing is ever actually “free.” Someone, somewhere, at some time, must bear the cost.

BTW, this goes for salvation too. It may be free for us (and it is), but it cost the Lord Jesus Christ beyond our understanding and comprehension.

Next time someone someone says something is “free,” kindly let them know that nothing is ever truly “free.”

Security

I have had to take a slight hiatus due to security concerns over this blog. I have a non-standard install and that doesn't help any at all in trying to secure things. However, in checking the normal security items, the blog seems pretty secure. Nonetheless, someone created some strange links to posts that I could not quite figure out what they were doing, or why.

So, hours were spent trying to learn everything I could about php hacks, SQL injections, and WordPress security issues. Hence, no articles were posted and little to no work was done on the rest of the websites. I would hate to think that I would have to create a virtual Fort Knox to simply publish on the web without constantly fighting intrusions. However, that is a sign of the world we live in. There are far too many people who delight in creating evil. After all, there is really no point in hacking a blog. There is no point in spreading spam everywhere either. Yet, individuals insist upon doing those very things.

Anyway, things should return to a more normal schedule this week.

Website Changes – Hymn format

The formatting of the hymns have been seriously upgraded and changed. The layout is now fixed-width even for standards compliant browsers as this particular type of document seems to do best in a fixed-width layout.

You can access any one of the hymns currently on the website through the [Hymns and Music page](#). Or, you can go directly to one of the hymns I like very much:

[Abba Father, We Approach Thee](#)

[O For a Shout of Joy](#)

[I Am Standing On the Word of God](#)

[I Send the Joys of Earth Away](#)

I could add more, but there is no point in putting the entire list on the blog. Please enjoy the hymns and let me know what you think of the new format.