

# The Barrel

By Benjamin D. Gribaudo

For as long as I remember, I've liked watching construction work. When younger, I built work sites with my Legos. I liked pretending highway work, closing off the roadway with tiny barrels where my toy men worked.

One day, some years ago, while wading in our neighborhood stream, my brother, a friend and I spied something interesting. Ahead, caught in the brush along the bank, lay an orange and white traffic control barrel. After tugging at it, we managed to pull it free. Excited, I lugged it home. Now, I had a real barrel of my own, and in excellent condition, too!

One of my parents suggested that I should try to return the drum to its owner. I didn't like that idea. I rationalized. I wasn't sure who owned it. It could belong to the county road repair department, the state highway administration, or a contractor. Anyway, traffic control barrels are only used on big roads. Since there aren't many highways near our stream, I thought it must have been washed down from far away. So, I kept it.

I enjoyed playing with that barrel. My brother fit perfectly inside. I would put it over his head and he made it walk. Only his feet could be seen! When I did yard work near our street, I placed it by the edge of the road to warn passing cars to watch out for me.

As I was putting the drum away one day, I felt uneasy inside. I hid the drum so no one could see it. That made me feel better. But, for some reason, I still felt a little funny about that drum.

Some years went by. God reminded me of several wrongs I did that I never made right. I took care of them and experienced the freedom that comes from obeying God's instruction to have a clear conscience. In particular, doing this removed a hindrance in my relationship with a childhood friend.

Then, I rediscovered the barrel behind the shed. I had forgotten about it. God convicted me that my rationalization had been wrong. I shouldn't have kept something that didn't belong to me. I determined to take care of the matter at once. I decided to call the county highway department. I didn't think much about whom to call; the Lord just led me to call them. I explained to the lady who answered that I had found a barrel. She said that she would have someone stop by and pick it up. Then, in an "Oh, by-the-way" attitude, I said that I hoped they didn't mind that I had kept the barrel for a few years. She responded, in the same attitude, that it was no problem.

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No one stopped by to pick up the barrel. And I'm glad no one did. I had failed to apply two important steps in gaining a clear conscience. When I called, I didn't really acknowledge that I had been wrong and I didn't ask for forgiveness. This was partly because I was afraid and partly because of my pride. God wanted me to experience full freedom about this matter and He knew that I wouldn't unless I applied these two steps, so He didn't allow the barrel to be picked up.

I called the county a second time. This time a man answered. I think he was the manager. Nervously I explained that I found a drum a few years back and that I was wrong for keeping it for so long. I asked him to forgive me. Graciously, he did. He arranged for someone to stop by and pick up the barrel.

Again, no one showed up! God, in His great love for me, wanted me to have complete freedom about this matter. He didn't want me to think back on it and feel even the slightest twinge in my conscience, so He reminded me of two things. When I found the barrel, it had been nice and shiny. Now it was weathered and sap stained. (I tried to clean it up, but that didn't work.) Also, I had carved my name onto the barrel.

I called the county again. This time a different woman answered. I explained about my conversation with the man and that no one had picked up the barrel. I told her about the two things I had forgotten to tell the man. (I was prepared to pay for the barrel, if that's what they wanted.) As it turned out, the lady said that she would tell him, but she didn't think it would be a problem. She arranged for someone to pick up the drum that afternoon. I was to put the barrel down by the street in front of my house.

Later that day, a county dump truck stopped in front of my home. A man stepped out and pitched the barrel into the back of the truck. After the truck rumbled off, I became excited. I knew I had done the right thing. I knew God was pleased with me. I no longer had even the slightest funny feeling when I thought about that barrel.



*"And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men." Acts 24:16*

Note: Unfortunately, the camera was not adjusted correctly when taking the above picture, so it is blurry.